

Joshua

The title of this book in Hebrew, Greek, and English comes from the main character in the story, Joshua, who may or may not have been the writer of the book. The title is appropriate because “Joshua” means “Yahweh saves.” Joshua is the Hebrew name that translates into Aramaic as Jesus. Where Exodus told the story of what Yahweh was saving Israel from, Joshua tells the story of what Yahweh is saving Israel *too*. This book is a record of Yahweh’s deliverance of the Israelites into the land of blessing that He had promised them.

The first word of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers has a prefix—the Hebrew letter *waw*. This is called a *waw-consecutive*, which creates a conjunction with the meaning of “and” or “and the.” This means that they were meant to be read as the sequel to Genesis—and sequentially from there. Conversely, the book of Deuteronomy does not begin with the conjunction *and*, while the books of Joshua through Kings do begin with the conjunction *and*. Thus, Genesis through Numbers are linked together and tell of Israel outside of the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the bridge between Israel not being in the land and Israel being in the land. In the same way, Joshua through Kings are linked together and tell about Israel in the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is the beginning of what scholars call the Deuteronomic History, which includes the books of Deuteronomy through Kings.

The authorship of the book of Joshua is anonymous even though undoubtedly Joshua did write some parts of the book (Josh. 24:26). Samuel or a contemporary of Samuel is most likely the compiler and editor of the book. This is seen in the repetition of the phrase “to this day” (Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 7:26; etc.). This points to a date no later than the 1000s BC because of the mention of the Jebusites occupying Jerusalem (Josh. 16:63; 16:10), whom David removed from Jerusalem in 1003 BC (2 Sam 5:6-10). The reference in Josh. 6:25 to Rahab still being alive suggests an even earlier date than the 1000s BC.¹

Setting

Genesis began by revealing Yahweh as the unique and sovereign creator over all creation. Yahweh created humanity as His image bearers to rule and subdue creation and to dwell with Him. Yet, humanity lost this intimate relationship with Yahweh when they chose self-autonomy over obeying Yahweh. However, because Yahweh is also a loving and covenantal God, He chose Abraham and His descendants to work out His plan of redemption for all of humanity and creation. Yahweh promised to give them land, to make them a great nation, to bless them, and to make them a blessing to the whole earth. Yahweh’s ultimate goal was to make Abraham into the great nation of Israel, which would serve Him by becoming a righteous people who would represent Him as His image; in doing so, they could bless the entire world by restoring the world back to what was lost in the Garden of Eden.

The book of Exodus tells of how Yahweh delivered His people from bondage and led them to Mount Sinai, where they would be brought into the presence of Yahweh and officially become His chosen nation. It is here that Yahweh gave them the Law (Ex. 19-24), the instructions for the tabernacle (Ex. 25-31), and the sacrificial system (Leviticus). The Law would reveal Yahweh’s righteous standards by which they were to live so that they could be the image of God to the

¹ For a further discussion see David M. Howard. *Joshua*, pp. 29-30. See also B. S. Childs. “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until this Day,’” p. 292.

world. The tabernacle would be a means for Yahweh to dwell with His people and guide them. This is the beginning of the restoration of the Garden. And the sacrificial system taught Israel what it meant to be clean and unclean, holy and common, along with the means to become clean and holy after one had become defiled by sin or death.

After a year at Mount Sinai, the book of Numbers records Israel's journey to the Promised Land. Upon their arrival, however, Israel refused to enter and take the Promised Land because of their lack of trust in Yahweh's ability to give it to them. Thus, Yahweh condemned Israel to wander in the wilderness for 38 years until the current generation died. The book ends with the new generation returning to the Promised Land and ready to enter the land (Deut. 1:3).

The book of Deuteronomy begins with Israel encamped in the Transjordan on the eastern side of the Jordan River ready to enter the Promised Land. Here, Moses gave three farewell speeches before He passed his mantle of leadership to Joshua.

It is after these farewell speeches that the book of Joshua picks up the story. It tells of Joshua leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land, a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Israel, to become the nation He intended them to be.

If the Exodus happened in 1446 BC (1 Kgs. 6:1) and Israel was in the wilderness for forty years, then Israel would have entered the Promised Land in about 1406 BC. The Book of Joshua covers about 35 years of Israel's history. The nation of Israel was camped out on the eastern side of the Jordan River and just north of the Dead Sea, ready to enter the Promised Land.

The references to Caleb's age allow us to determine the length of the conquest of Canaan. Caleb had received the promise of a portion in the land 38 years before Israel entered Canaan (Num. 14:24). Caleb was 40 years old then (Josh. 14:7). He was 85 at the end of the conquest (Josh. 14:10). Forty-five years had elapsed, and Caleb had spent 38 of them in the wilderness. Therefore, the conquest must have taken the remaining seven years.

Genesis	Exodus	Levitcus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
		1st day 1st month 2nd year	1st day 2nd month 2nd year	1st day 11th month 40th year
Travel through the wilderness				
In Canaan	In Egypt	Encamped at Mount Sinai	In the Wilderness	On the Plains of Moab
Gen. 46:1 30 years Ex. 1:8-14	Ex. 12:41 2 months Ex. 19:1	10 months Ex. 40:2, 17	1 month Num. 1:11 20 days Num. 10:11 38 years 3 months 10 days	40 years Num. 25:18 5 months Deut. 1:3 2 months Deut 34:5-8
1887 BC	1446 BC			1406 BC

Purpose

The first purpose of the book of Joshua is to demonstrate Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel to fulfill His promises to give them the land of Canaan. Over and over again, the narrator makes the point that Israel conquered the land of Canaan and received the tribal allotments that He had promised them. Joshua is the first book to refer to the land of Israel. This serves as an apology

for Yahweh, that all of Israel's previous defeats in the wilderness were not due to His lack of power or faithfulness.

The second purpose of the book is to call Israel to remain faithful to Yahweh so that they may receive His blessings. Their faithfulness is why they have had success in the land when their parents did not in the wilderness. If Israel wants to continue to experience the presence and blessings of Yahweh, they must hold to His Law in obedience.

Themes

The emphasis of the book of Joshua is on Yahweh's faithfulness in giving Israel the land that He promised to the patriarchs. The idea is that when Israel finally placed their trust in Yahweh's ability to bring them into the Promised Land, they would be ready to receive the full promises of Yahweh.

The Land

The possession and the allotment of the Promised Land are the major focus of the book. Yahweh had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; 22:17) and to his descendants (Gen. 26:304; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4; 50:4). Yahweh would use the land of Canaan as the restoration of the Garden of Eden that was lost in the fall. Just as Yahweh dwelt with humanity in the garden (Gen. 1-2) so He would dwell with Israel in the Promised Land. If Israel was obedient to Yahweh, then He would send the rain (Deut. 28:1-14), and it would be a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8, 17; 6:4, 8).

Despite Israel's lack of obedience in their journey to the land (Exodus and Numbers), which delayed their entrance into the land, Yahweh was still faithful to bring them to the long-awaited land that He had promised. The book of Joshua tells of Yahweh's faithfulness to fight their battles for them so that they could take the land and live there. The fact that the last half of the book is dedicated to the allotment of the land to the twelve tribes shows that this is the main point of the book.

The Faithfulness of Yahweh

Yahweh demonstrated His faithfulness to Israel by showing them over and over that He was with them and would give them the land and victories that He had promised them. From the very beginning Yahweh assured Joshua of His presence (Josh. 1:5, 9, 17; 5:13-15). He revealed Himself to Joshua and Israel in the crossing of the Jordan River (Josh. 3-4) and in the destruction of Jericho as the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant (Josh. 6). Yahweh also revealed His faithfulness to Israel by filling the enemy with fear of Himself and of Israel (Josh. 2:10-11; 4:24; 5:1; 10:6-14).

The clearest place where the book of Joshua shows the faithfulness of Yahweh was after the long list of land allotments (Josh. 12-21). Here, the narrator emphasizes the faithfulness of Yahweh in providing Israel with the Promised Land just as He had promised (Josh. 21:43-45; 23:14). On an individual level Caleb and Joshua also received land allotments as promised by Yahweh for their faithfulness in the wilderness journey (Josh. 14:6-15; 24:29-30)

Israel's Need to Be Faithful to Yahweh

Because Yahweh had demonstrated His faithfulness to Israel again and again, He expected them to respond with devotion and faithful obedience. The only way that Israel could experience success and the blessings of Yahweh was if they obeyed His commands. They must forsake making alliances with the other nations and their gods (Josh. 23:5-8) and must not worship the pagan gods (Josh. 24:14-15). Yahweh's promises were trustworthy (Josh. 23:14), but if the people disobeyed and assimilated with the Canaanite culture (Josh. 23:9-13), then Yahweh would remove them from the land (Josh. 23:15-16) and punish them for their rebellion (Josh. 24:19-28).

This contrast is seen clearly in the lives of Achan and Caleb. Achan forfeited the blessings of Yahweh when he stole from Yahweh and then hid it. The judgment was removal from the land and the loss of his life (Josh. 7:25-26). In contrast, Caleb demonstrated faith, received his Promised Land inheritance, and then continued to demonstrate obedience by easily conquering the Canaanites just as Yahweh had commanded (Josh. 14:6-15; 15:13-17).

The Need for Unity

The unity of Israel is an important idea that is established, and Joshua and will become integral to the overall history of Israel that is developed in the remaining historical books. In the beginning, the Trans-Jordan tribes were willing, supported their fellow tribes and contributed to the conquest of the land (Josh. 1:12-18). All the tribes demonstrated unity when they helped each other take the land even though each tribe would only inherit a small portion of the land as a whole. Later, when the western tribes mistakenly suspected the eastern tribes of abandoning Yahweh, they cleared up the misunderstanding through communication with the eastern tribes rather than by going to war (Josh. 22:10-34). The unity of the nation is also seen in the sin of Achan when Yahweh punished the entire nation for the sin of one family (Josh. 7:1, 11, 13, 24-26). This unity would begin to fall apart in the book of Judges and eventually lead to the downfall of the nation as a whole.

Structure

The book of Joshua is divided into three sections: the preparations for entering the land of promise (Josh. 1-5), the actual conquest of the land (Josh. 6-12), and the apportioning of the Promised Land (Josh. 13-24). The first part of the book (Josh. 1-12) is mostly narrative of Israel's entrance into the land and the taking of the land. The second half (Josh. 13-24) is mostly legal language detailing the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. The fact that only a small portion of the book is given to the conquest and the majority is given to the allotment of the land shows that the main focus is not on the military conquest but on Yahweh's faithfulness to give all twelve tribes the land that He had promised them.

Outline

- I. Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (1:1–5:15)
 - A. Instructions for Inheriting the Promised Land (1:1–18)
 - B. A Foreigner’s Welcome (2:1–24)
 - C. Crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land (3:1–5:1)
 - D. Ritual Preparations (5:2–15)
- II. Inheriting the Promised Land (6:1–12:24)
 - A. The Fall of Jericho (6:1–27)
 - B. Sin Hinders Israel’s Victory (7:1–8:35)
 - C. The Treaty with the Gibeonites (9:1–10:27)
 - D. The Southern and Northern Campaigns (10:28–12:24)
- III. Apportioning the Promised Land Inheritance (13:1–24:33)
 - A. The Land East and West of the Jordan River (13:1–19:51)
 - B. The Levitical Cities (20:1–21:42)
 - C. Joshua’s Final Acts and Death (22:1–24:33)

I. Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (1:1–5:15)

Before Israel could take the Promised Land, Joshua and the people had to be prepared to fight the battles, and this would be based on their trust in Yahweh and on their unity as a nation. This section begins with the reminder of who they are as a people and the faith of Rahab to join them in their identity in Yahweh. After bringing Israel into the Promised Land, Yahweh emphasized their unity in their covenant with Him—through their circumcision and their celebration of the Passover festival.

A. Instructions for Inheriting the Promised Land (1:1–18)

Before their entering the Promised Land, the narrator ties the book of Deuteronomy with the book of Joshua and the establishment of Joshua, the new Moses, as leader over Israel.

1:1–5 After Moses' death, Yahweh reiterated to Joshua the promise that He would bring Israel into the Promised Land, just as He had said to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses before him (Gen. 13:17; Ex. 23:30–31; Deut. 11:24). Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chr. 7:27), who was the son of Joseph and received the firstborn title (Gen. 48). The close repetition of the land promise to Israel in Deut. 11:24–25 and Josh. 1:3–5 assured Israel that Yahweh was committed to keeping His promises.

The verb “to give” (*natan*) is used in Deuteronomy and Joshua to mean several things. First, the land of Canaan was Yahweh's gift to Israel. Second, Yahweh also gave the pagan Canaanites to Israel. Third, Yahweh was now fulfilling His promise to the patriarchs. Still, the giving of the land is to be viewed from two different perspectives: that the land already belonged to Israel because Yahweh promised and gave it to them, but that the giving had not yet happened because Israel still had to take it.²

The land of the Hittites does not refer to Anatolia (modern Turkey) of the Hittite empire but to the land of Syria, known as the “Hatti Land” in ancient manuscripts. The Hittites are also used in a representative sense to refer to all the tribes in Canaan (1 Kgs. 10:29; 2 Kgs. 7:6; Ezek. 16:3).

1:4–9 Just as He had to Moses, Yahweh promised Joshua that nothing could stand against them and told him to be strong and courageous (Deut. 31:6). The word “strong” refers to the strength of the hands and their ability to hold on firmly. The word “courageous” refers to the strength in the knees for standing fast. This confidence and strength could be found only in Yahweh and His promises.

The key to Joshua's success would be their obedience to the commands of Yahweh. The repetition of the need to obey the Law emphasizes how important this was to Yahweh and to the success of Joshua and Israel. This is not a promise of success in life in general; this promise was that they would succeed in what Yahweh had for them to accomplish—the conquest of the land.

The phrase “from your mouth” refers to the custom of muttering the words of Yahweh while studying or reflecting on the read Scriptures. The Hebrew word *hagah*, translated “meditate,” literally means “mutter.” To continually mutter or recite the words of Yahweh means to be continually thinking about them and thus incorporating them into one's life in practical ways.³

² See David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 81.

³ See Donald H. Madvig. “Joshua.” In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 257.

The chiastic structure of Yahweh's charge to Joshua focuses on obedience to the Torah as the key to success.

A I will be with you (1:5)

B Be strong and courageous (1:6-7)

C That you may have success (1:7)

X This book of the law (1:8)

C' Then you will have success (1:8)

B' Be strong and courageous (1:9)

A' Yahweh your God is with you (1:9)

1:10-11 Without hesitation, Joshua, just like Moses before him, went to the leaders of Israel to prepare to cross the Jordan River in three days and begin their conquest of the land.

1:12-18 The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh had previously asked Moses to settle in the land east of the Jordan that had already been conquered (Num. 32). Moses agreed to this on the condition that they cross the Jordan and help the other tribe conquer the land of Canaan before they settled in their own land. Joshua reminded them of this oath, and they wholeheartedly committed themselves to Joshua as they had to Moses before him.

However, the people as a whole did not always obey Yahweh's commands (Josh. 6:17-19; 7:1) or follow through on their obligation to drive out the Canaanites from the land (Josh. 11:22; 13:1; 15:63; 16:120; 17:12-13). As always in the Bible, there is a tension between the words and the actions of the people.

B. A Foreigner's Welcome (2:1-24)

The first thing Joshua did as Israel's leader was sending two spies into Jericho. However, what is interesting is that the two spies do very little spying at all and come back to Joshua with no military intelligence. The narrative is dominated by the spies' time with Rahab, her knowledge of Israel and its God, and her desire to become a part of the covenant. That this is how the book of Joshua begins shows the true heart of Yahweh despite the judgment and conquest of Canaan.

2:1-7 Joshua sent two spies from Shittim into the land of Canaan. Two earlier episodes are alluded to here. First, Shittim was the place where the Israelites prostituted themselves with the Moabite women and Ba'al (Num. 25:1-3). Second, it recalls the spies whom Moses sent and who convinced the people that Yahweh could not give them the land (Num. 13-14). This is a reminder that the delayed fulfillment of Yahweh's promise is not due to Yahweh's unfaithfulness but to theirs.

Joshua commanded the spies to specifically go to the city of Jericho. Jericho was located just north of the Dead Sea on the western side of the Jordan River. The name Jericho means "house of the moon god." This was a very important military city that controlled intersecting roads in this region.

Why the men ended up in the house of the prostitute Rahab is not directly explained. The house of a prostitute was often the first place travelers would visit when coming into a new city. Perhaps they went to Rahab's in order to not stand out as foreigners in the midst of other travelers. The text here carefully avoids the suggestion that the spies and Rahab had any sexual relations. The verb *bow* ("entered") is used commonly for entering a building (Judg. 9:5; 2 Sam. 12:20; 2 Kgs. 19:1). When "entered" is used to indicate sexual intercourse, no direct object is used (such as "the house"). The pattern in that case is for a preposition to follow, as in "Samson went in (entered) to her" (Judg. 16:1; Gen 6:16:2; 30:3).⁴

Rahab showed her desire to be included in the covenant promises of Yahweh when she hid the two spies and sent her own people on a false trail after the spies.

2:8-14 When the king's men left, Rahab seized the moment and exploited the ignorance and fear of the king's men. She controlled the conversation with the spies as she had done with the king's men, and the spies remained passive. Her knowledge of Israel's history and beliefs are remarkable. Rahab told of how everyone in Jericho was afraid of Israel, a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Israel (Ex. 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25). Rahab mentioned first the exodus, which happened forty years ago (Ex. 14), and yet it was still on the minds of those who lived in Jericho. Second, the fact that Yahweh had defeated Sihon and Og more recently (Num. 21:21-35) showed that He was still powerful over the nations. Rahab wanted to be a part of Israel because she had seen a God of power and faithfulness that she had never seen in any other god.

Rahab showed an understanding of Yahweh and His promises when she stated that Yahweh would give Israel the land and that Yahweh was the God of the sky (most translations have "heaven") and earth. She also stated the personal name of God and acknowledged that He is sovereign over all creation. The phrase "sky and earth" is a merism, where two parts of a whole are stated to refer to the whole—so everything that is in the sky and on the earth. No other

⁴ See David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 98.

pagan god was the god of both the sky and earth. Prior to this passage, this statement appears only three other times (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 4:39; 5:8).

Rahab then demanded a guarantee that the spies would spare her and her family from the coming destruction. Finally, the spies were allowed to talk, and they agreed to her demand and pledged their lives to her if they failed to keep her alive. However, their pledge was contingent upon her keeping their presence in the city quiet.

2:15-24 The two spies told Rahab that in order to escape the destruction of Jericho, she had to mark her window with a red thread so that Israel would pass over her home when they put the city to the sword. The scarlet thread does not foreshadow the blood of Jesus. The word *sani* (“scarlet”) is used of the thread or fabrics used in the tabernacle (Ex. 28; 35-39), not to the blood sacrifices. The only time the color of blood is mentioned is in 2 Kgs. 3:22, referring to what the water looked like. Nowhere does the Second Testament hint at a connection between the red thread and the blood of Jesus. The word “red” is used in Gen. 38:28, 30 to refer to the red cord that Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in-law, wrapped around the foot of one of her twin boys. The son’s name is Zerah and is mentioned in one of the genealogies of Jesus (Matt. 1:3). Just as Tamar, a Canaanite woman, became a part of the Abrahamic Covenant and was included in the line of Christ, so also Rahab, a Canaanite woman, became a part of the covenant and the line of Christ (Matt. 1:5). The second use of the word “red” is in the Passover (Ex. 12), when the Israelites were protected by the painting of “red” blood as a sign to not be destroyed.⁵ In the same way Israel escaped judgment through faith, so also Rahab escaped judgment through faith (Ex. 12).

The spies marked the house of Rahab as predestined for salvation, and whoever chose to be found in her house would be saved. It was Rahab’s job to be an evangelist and find others who wanted to be a part of the Abrahamic Covenant. Already, the promise to Abraham that Yahweh would bless the world through him was being fulfilled (Gen. 12:1-4).

Prior to her confession, the Israelites showed no interest in entering into treaties with the Canaanites. In fact, the making of treaties with the Canaanites was forbidden by Yahweh (Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18). Yet Joshua and Yahweh both honored this treaty. This creates a tension between the fact that they immediately disobeyed Yahweh while at the same time a woman and her family are blessed through the people of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3). Nowhere does the Bible condemn this action, and, in fact, she makes it into the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). This implies that Yahweh was willing to save from judgment anyone who responds in faith—even a Canaanite, female prostitute. Just as Israel was supposed to die after their disobedience to the Law through the worshiping of the golden calf but were spared through the intercessory repentance of Moses before Yahweh (Ex. 32:1-14), so Rahab was spared from the judgment of the Law through her faith and repentance. Rahab showed herself to be an aggressive woman who would do anything to become a part of the Abrahamic Covenant in the same way as Tamar before her (Gen. 38).

“The spies violated God’s explicit command that none of the people living in the land were to be spared (Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18). Rahab, however, turned to God and sought deliverance. Her experience is proof of the gracious saving purpose of God. His overarching decree is that ‘everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved’ (Joel 2:32). This is one of the

⁵ See David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 116.

most dramatic examples of grace in the OT and is set in bold relief by the questionable aspects of Rahab's profession and conversion.”⁶

“The salvation of Rahab is an example of what God would have done for others also. The king and the other citizens of Jericho knew all that she knew, but they did not turn to Israel's God for mercy. The fear that drove her to beg for mercy drove them in their stubborn rebellion. Accordingly, the others are called ‘the disobedient’ in Hebrews 11:31...”⁷

What is interesting about this story is that the two spies did not spy out any other parts of the city and gathered no military or infrastructure intelligence. They operated more like witnesses seeking the righteous for deliverance from judgment than like spies. In fact James calls the two spies messengers (James 2:25). Just as Yahweh sent two messengers (angels) into Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) to extract the righteous from the coming judgment (Gen. 18:16-33), so He also sent two messengers into Jericho to extract the righteous from the coming judgment. Though the text does not directly explain why the men chose to go to Rahab's house, Rahab's faith explains why Yahweh had directed them there.

⁶ Donald H. Madvig. “Joshua.” In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 264.

⁷ Donald H. Madvig. “Joshua.” In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 264.



C. Crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land (3:1–5:1)

The entrance into the Promised Land was an extremely important event in Israel's life, for it was the beginning of the fulfillment of the covenant promises that Yahweh had made to them (Gen. 12:1-14; 15; 17). There are three movements that begin with commands from Yahweh to Joshua (Josh. 3:7-8; 4:1-3; 4:15-16) followed by the obedience of the people. Thus it is Yahweh who is giving them the land because they are obedient. However, the emphasis of Josh. 3-4 is not specifically on the crossing of the Jordan River but on Israel's proper remembrance of this great event.

The story of Yahweh began in Genesis 1-2, where Yahweh created a garden and placed humanity in it and then joined them in order to fellowship with them. When they sinned, they were cast out of the garden eastward, and two cherubim were placed at the eastern entrance to guard it (Gen. 3:22-24). From that point on, the restoration of the garden is a major metanarrative in the Bible. Moving eastward, away from the garden, is seen as bad and as Yahweh's judgment (Gen. 4:16; 11:1-2; 13:10-13), while moving westward is seen as good.

Yahweh then came to Abraham and promised him the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-3, 7), which would be the beginning of the restoration of the garden. Just as with the garden, angels protected the borders of Canaan. When Jacob fled from the land and his birthright, he moved eastward out of the land and encountered angels (Gen. 28:10-22). When he returned to the land and his birthright, he moved westward into the land and encountered angels (Gen. 32:1-2, 22-32). When Yahweh told Israel to build a tabernacle, which would be a symbol of the garden of Eden and be the dwelling place of Yahweh, the gate was in the east, and it was guarded by the images of the two cherubim that were stitched onto the fabric of the gate.

Now Israel was entering into the Promised Land from the east, moving westward, through the eastern "gate" between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, which serve as a visual symbol of the two posts of the eastern gate. When Israel crossed the border, Joshua immediately encountered an angel who was the commander of Yahweh's army guarding the eastern gate of the Jordan River into the land of Canaan (Josh. 5:13-15). This imagery makes it clear that Israel is truly the Promised Land and that Yahweh was going to use it to begin the restoration of the Garden of Eden.

3:1-6 Joshua and the leaders gave specific commands to the people that they were not to move until the Ark of the Covenant went before them and that they were to follow the Ark of the Covenant. They were also to keep their distance from the Ark of the Covenant, just like at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19) since it was sign of Yahweh's holy presence.

Though the pillar of fire and cloud was still with Israel, it was now the Ark of the Covenant that led Israel into the Promised Land. The pillar of fire and cloud was a symbol of Yahweh's holy presence and judgment of sin whereas the Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of His covenant faithfulness. The narrator mentioned the Ark of the Covenant seventeen times in chapters 3 and 4. Only the Levites, the priests of Yahweh, were to carry the Ark of the Covenant.

"...the ark was carried in front of the people, not so much to show the road as to make a road by dividing the waters of the Jordan, and the people were to keep at a distance from it, that they might not lose sight of the ark, but keep their eyes fixed upon it, and know the road by looking at the ark of the covenant by which the road had been made, i.e., might know and

observe how the Lord, through the medium of the ark, was leading them to Canaan by a way which they had never traversed before; i.e., by a miraculous way.”⁸

3:7-8 Yahweh then told Joshua that what He was about to do at the Jordan River would confirm Joshua as His chosen leader, just as He had done for Moses (Ex. 14:31). Yahweh commanded that the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant lead the way across the Jordan River.

3:9-13 Joshua stood before the people, just as Moses had done at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13-14), and told them that Yahweh was going to make His presence and power known to them on this very day. Yahweh promised to do miracles for Israel to demonstrate to them that He was the same God who had brought their parents out of Egypt (Ex. 34:10). Yahweh and, later, Jesus Christ do not do miracles to make the people’s lives more comfortable but rather to reveal the sovereignty and character of Yahweh and to validate His words and promises. The title “the Lord of all the earth” (Josh. 3:11) appears here for the first time in Scripture and emphasizes Yahweh as absolute ruler over the planet, pointing to His right to give the land of Canaan to Israel. The reference to the living God is in contrast to the “dead” false pagan gods.

3:14-17 Without fear, complaining, or hesitation, unlike in the days of Moses, the people obeyed Yahweh through Joshua and followed the priests across the dry ground of the Jordan River. When the priests stepped into the Jordan River, it stopped flowing and heaped up to the north of them.

“The Israelites crossed the Jordan when the river was at its widest, deepest, and swiftest, in late April or early May. As the snow on Mt. Hermon melts and the rainy season ends, the Jordan rises to a depth of 10-12 feet and floods to a width of 300-360 feet at this point today. Normally it is only 150-180 feet wide here. The people considered crossing the river at this time of year by swimming a heroic feat in ancient times (cf. 1 Chron. 12:15). This is probably how the spies crossed.”⁹

The crossing of the Jordan River is not only symbolic of this new generation’s baptism—as was the crossing of the Red Sea out of Egypt (Ex. 14; 1 Cor. 10:1-2)—but it would also have been a sign to Israel that Yahweh was picking up where they had left off forty years ago.

“These verses are the climax of the chapter—indeed, of all of chaps. 3-4. Here the narrative slows to a crawl so that the reader can savor the wonder of the miracle and view it from as many different perspectives as possible: The author, by writing in this way, affirms God’s greatness and power and intervention on his people’s behalf. The point is not so much that the people were able to cross over the Jordan, but the *manner* in which they were able to cross: by a glorious and mighty miracle of God. The immediate purpose of the miracle was obviously to get Israel across the Jordan. However, the larger purpose was—as it is with all miracles—to testify to God’s greatness and faithfulness, both to Israel (v. 10) and to all the peoples of the earth (4:24a), and to stimulate proper worship of him (4:24b).”¹⁰

4:1-18 Joshua 4 celebrates the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan River by covering much of the same information that Joshua 3 did. However, Joshua 4 adds the memorializing of the event through their building of a monument.

⁸ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 41.

⁹ Thomas L Constable. *Notes on Joshua*, p. 19.

¹⁰ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 129.

Yahweh commanded Joshua to gather stones from the Jordan River in order to build a memorial at their camp in Gilgal. This was to be a reminder of the Jordan River crossing. Joshua also set up another one in the middle of the Jordan River, rising up out of the water (Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 35:7). These two monuments would be a testament to the fact that the miraculous Jordan River crossing had really happened and a teaching opportunity to the next generation, just as Moses had instructed in Deuteronomy (Deut. 6:4-9). The very large river stones could have been gathered out of the river and the monument built in the river only if the water of the river had truly been stopped. This is the exact place where John the Baptizer conducted his ministry of baptism (Mark 1:4-5; Jn. 1:28). The fact that the memorials were made up of twelve stones was a reminder of the unity of the nation as twelve tribes.

The narrator emphasizes that the people did all that Yahweh had commanded and without hesitation. The priests remained in the river until all the people had crossed and the memorial was built. The reference to Rueben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh shows that they were honoring their promise to help their fellow tribes take the land.

4:19-24 Up to this point, Israel is said to have crossed the Jordan River from an outside-the-land perspective. From this point forward, they are said to have come out of or up from the Jordan River, from an inside-the-land perspective. Gilgal was the first Israelite base during the conquest, then Shiloh (Josh. 18:1), and then Shechem (Josh. 24:1).

The Jordan River crossing happened on the 10th of Nissan, four days before the Passover feast (Ex. 12:3). The emphasis on the Passover in this passage also makes the point that Yahweh was picking up where He left off forty years earlier—just as the Red Sea and Jordan River crossings made this connection.

5:1 Rahab had already said that all of Canaan was afraid of Israel because of how Yahweh had brought Israel through the Red Sea (Josh. 2:8-11). Now, after the Jordan River crossing, the Canaanites' fear increased significantly, and the battle had not even begun. The Canaanites' fear of what Yahweh had done for Israel was a testament to the fact that none of the other gods had ever done anything like this for the other nations. Yahweh showed Himself as unique to all the other gods in both His power and His love.

D. Ritual Preparations (5:2-15)

Before Israel could actually take the land of Canaan in conquest, Yahweh reminded them of their unity in their covenant with him by having them go through the rituals of circumcision and the Passover festival. These two rituals would remind them of Yahweh's covenant with them through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15; 17) and His deliverance *from* their slavery in Egypt. Now Yahweh was ready to deliver them *into* the Promised Land.

5:2-9 Not only had the previous generation rebelled against Yahweh in the wilderness, they had failed to circumcise their sons. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and was required by Yahweh in order to take part in the blessings of Israel (Gen. 17; Ex. 12). This generation could not receive the blessings of the Promised Land if they had not made themselves a part of the covenant of Yahweh. The timing of the circumcision after the crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised land marks Israel's new identification with the Promised Land.

“God had promised Abraham this land (Gen. 12:7; 15:7, 16, 18-21; etc.), and it was to belong to his descendants in perpetuity (Gen. 17:8). Yet, because of the wilderness generation’s rebelliousness, God had sworn to them that they would *not* see this land (see Num. 14:20-23). While the elements of this covenant would not be broken by God and they remained in effect throughout all generations, each generation of Israelites—indeed, each individual Israelites—had to make its own decision whether to obey the covenant. That is the point of circumcision as the sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:9-14); an individual’s failure to circumcise was tantamount to breaking the covenant, and whoever did not do this was cut off from the rest of Israel (17:14). However, the covenant as a whole remained in effect for the nation; it was the rebellious individual or group who was cut off. If the entire nation sinned, God would take the land completely away from them (Deut. 4:25-27; 8:19-20; 30:17-18; etc.), but even when it did happen at the time of the exile, God brought Israel back to the land (Jer. 29:10; Ezra 1-2; etc.). God’s promise to Abraham’s descendants would be fulfilled to the nation as a whole, but not every last individual would automatically participate; faith and obedience were required. Joshua 5:7 shows this by stating that God raised up another generation to replace the one he had consigned to perish in the wilderness.”¹¹

“Both names’ meanings have significance to the story. Gibeath-Haaraloth’s is obvious (‘Hill of Foreskins’). Gilgal’s is a play on the word *galal*, which means ‘to roll.’ In v. 9, the spot is called ‘Gilgal’ because God had ‘rolled away’ the reproach of Egypt. The first name is found only here in the Old Testament, while the second is found forty times, including three times before this story (Deut. 11:30; Josh 4:19, 20).”¹²

Yahweh’s bringing Israel into the Promised Land removed “the reproach of Egypt” (Josh. 5:9). This was an accusation started by the Egyptians that Yahweh had led the Israelites out of Egypt only to destroy them in the wilderness (Ex. 32:12; Num. 14:13-16; Deut. 9:28). That He had brought Israel into the Promised Land removed (literally, “rolled away”) this criticism. Gilgal means “rolling away.” The circumcision of the Israelites was the rolling away of both the foreskin and the reproach of Egypt.

5:10-12 Israel now celebrated the Passover (Ex. 12) and ate the produce of the land. Yahweh brought an end to the bread that He had supernaturally provided for Israel for the last forty years

¹¹ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, pp. 150-151.

¹² David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 149.

in the wilderness (Ex. 16:35) because they were now in a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev. 20:24; Num. 13:27; 14:8; 16:13-14; Deut. 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Josh. 5:6; Songs 4:11; Jer. 11:5; 32:22; Ezek. 20:6, 15) and they began to live off the land that they possessed.

5:13-15 After crossing the eastern border into the Promised Land, Joshua saw an angelic figure with a drawn sword. An angel with a drawn sword in his hand is described only two other times in the First Testament, with Bala'am (Num. 22:23, 31) and David (1 Chr. 21:16). Joshua asked him if he was a friend or foe. The angelic being did not answer Joshua's question but stated something far more important: that He was the commander of Yahweh's heavenly host. The heavenly host in the Bible refers to the angelic army of Yahweh. The angelic being did not answer Joshua's question in order to teach him a lesson about priorities. Yahweh had already promised to be with them and give them the land. The angel was just now making his presence known to Joshua as a further encouragement. Joshua's bowing to the angel was not an act of worship but a cultural act of humility and of honoring a superior. The command to Joshua to remove his sandals would have connected in Joshua's mind this visitation to that of Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:5).

“The whole sequence—circumcision, Passover, and theophany—emphatically declared that the Israel of conquest was the Israel of exodus. The God who had saved his people out of Egypt would now save them in Canaan.”¹³

There are some who have said that this is a First Testament appearance of Jesus Christ because Joshua bowed down to him. As mentioned already this was not an act of worship. There is nothing here or in the Second Testament that even hints at this. If this was Christ, then the Second Testament would have certainly pointed this out to strengthen their argument to the Jewish people that Christ has been around since the First Testament. In fact, the author of Hebrews goes out of his way to make it clear that Christ is superior to the angels and is not one of them (Heb. 1-2).

“At the end of the first main section of the Book of Joshua, the Israelites stand well-prepared for their first major encounter with the Canaanites whose land they were to inherit. They were well prepared because (1) God was very much with them, (2) because he had given them a leader who was already in process of becoming a worthy successor to Moses, (3) because the entire nation was taking care to obey God's commands o the letter (from Joshua and the priests on down to the people), and (4) because they were careful to sanctify themselves properly before engaging the Canaanites.”¹⁴

¹³ Eugene H. Merrill. *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 109.

¹⁴ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 161.

II. Inheriting the Promised Land (6:1–12:24)

After forty years of delayed entrance into the land because of Israel's sin, they were now ready to enter. Yahweh led Israel to city after city that they easily conquered because of their faith and obedience to Yahweh. Unlike all the complaining and lack of faith of the previous generation, the book of Joshua never mentions this generation of Israel as a whole complaining or failing to trust in Yahweh for the conquest of the land. It is obvious that they had listened and responded to Moses' farewell speeches in Deuteronomy.

This division begins with a slow and detailed account of the military encounters with Jericho (Josh. 6) and Ai (Josh. 7-8). The division then covers concerns for keeping proper covenantal relations (Josh. 8-9) and then a quick summary of Israel's conquest of the rest of the land (Josh. 10-12). This division is the only part of the book that covers the military conquest of the land, and only three of the chapters go into detail.

What is interesting is that there is no mention of the size, strength, and weapons of the enemies they go against; these do not matter in light of Yahweh's being with Israel. In fact, other than Jericho, there is very little mention of Israel's strategies in conquering the cities of Canaan. This shows that the emphasis is not on the battles but on Yahweh's fulfilling His promise to Israel.

In addition, the fact that this division is a small part of the whole of the book shows that the primary message of the book is not a military one. The military-style encounters are a means to two ends: first, Yahweh's fulfillment to His promise in giving Israel its inheritance of the land; second, Yahweh's punishment of the local inhabitants of the land for their wickedness.

Throughout all of the book of Joshua is Israel's God fulfilling His promises to His people, guiding, caring, and, when needed, fighting for them.¹⁵

There were ten nations total that needed to be destroyed in order to secure the Promised Land. Three nations had already been sacked—the Amalakites (Ex. 17), Shihon, and Og (Num. 21; Deut. 2-3). Joshua now faced seven remaining nations. Deut. 20:16-18 is an important backdrop to how the people of Canaan were to be treated in the conquest.

A. The Fall of Jericho and Ai (6:1-27)

This section records the official beginning of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. Yahweh would demonstrate to Israel that it was not their swords but His presence that would give them victory. This was demonstrated through the fact that they walked around the city led by the Ark of the Covenant and the priests, not by swords.

Also in Israel's favor was that when Israel began their conquest, the city-states of Canaan no longer had the protection of the Egyptian empire.

"Before Israel entered the land of Canaan God had been preparing for His people to take possession of it by sovereignly directing the political affairs of Egypt. Egypt had maintained control over Canaan for many years. However, with the ascension of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (1417-1379 B.C.) to the throne, Egyptian interest in Canaanite affairs began to decline. Consequently, some of the Canaanite kings asserted their independence from Egyptian control and began to increase their influence and to dominate their neighbors. In addition, foreigners besides the Israelites invaded portions of Canaan. Some of the victims of

¹⁵ See David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 166.

oppression wrote letters to Pharaoh asking for Egyptian assistance. They sent these letters to Amarna, the capital of Egypt at this time, and they are known today as the Amarna Letters. They wrote these documents in cuneiform script. Archaeologists discovered them at Amarna in 1887. They provide much valuable information on the political and military climate in Canaan during the period of Israel's conquests.”¹⁶

“While Akhenaten [Amenhotep III, 1379-1361 B.C., the son and successor of Amenhotep II] spent his life preoccupied with religious reform, Egyptian prestige in Asia sank to a low ebb. As the Amarna Letters abundantly show, no effort was made by the court to answer the frantic appeals for help made by some princes who still professed loyalty to Egypt. The most common complaint in these letters is that unless Egypt would send troops urgently the land would fall into the hands of the Khapiru. Some historians are inclined to see in these Khapiru the Hebrews of the Bible who at this time were overrunning Palestine.”¹⁷

6:1-5 The narrator never mentions why Israel was to march around Jericho one time for six days and seven times on the seventh day while blowing trumpets. However, it seems likely that Yahweh was showing them that He was the real power behind the defeat of Jericho by the fact that walking around a city would never lead to its collapse, but it did because Yahweh commanded it. Their obedience to a command that made no sense showed that their victory over Jericho came through their faith in the command and promise of Yahweh.

The priests with the Ark of the Covenant leading the battle showed that this was more a spiritual war than a military one. Just as the arrangement of the tribes around the tabernacle while camping and marching (Numbers 1-10) communicated that Israel was the army of Yahweh their king, so here Yahweh, through the Ark of the Covenant, led Israel into battle as their king.

The number seven, which symbolically communicates completion, shows that their faith is what led to the complete destruction of the city of Jericho.

“The emphasis on the number seven (fourteen times in this chapter [cf. Exod. 24:16; 2 Kings 3:9; Job 2:11-13; Ezek. 3:15]), the use of ceremonial trumpets (made from ram's horns), the presence of priests, and the prominence of the ark all indicate that the conquest of Jericho was more than a military campaign; it was a religious event. Israel must always remember that the land was God's gift to them.”¹⁸

The trumpets that the priests blew were the shofar (ram's horn). The blowing of the shofar signifies calling upon Yahweh and His covenant to come down and act on Israel's behalf (Ex. 19: 16-19; 20:14, 18; Lev. 23:24; 25:9).

6:6-14 That Israel obeyed without hesitating or complaining showed their great faith in Yahweh and that they had taken heed to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy to trust and obey Yahweh, unlike their parents before them in the wilderness.

Archeology has shown that Jericho's walls enclosed about eight and one half acres of land. Such a small area means that most of the day Israel would have not been at the city walls. Yahweh's defeat of the first city would be done without Israel, just like His judgment of Egypt through the

¹⁶ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Joshua*, p. 25.

¹⁷ Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East*, p. 90. See also Nadav Na'aman, “Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45:4 (October 1986):271-88.

¹⁸ Donald H. Madvig. “Joshua.” In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 281.

plagues. Excavations of the city of Jericho by John Garstang (1930-1936) have confirmed the collapse of the city walls under itself and that the invaders burned the city. Based on the pottery and other items in the city, Garstang concluded that the destruction of the city happened between 1400 and 1410 BC. This matches up with the Bible's stating that the Exodus happened in 1446 BC (1 Kgs. 6:1) and that Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years before entering the land of Canaan. Though a secondary archeologist of Jericho (Kathleen Kenyon, 1952-1958) has disputed this date, Garstang's dates have never really been disproven.

“On the basis of the scarabs and pottery found in the cemetery associated with City IV in Jericho, it is impossible to date the fall of that city subsequent to 1400 B.C., despite all of the negative findings of Kathleen Kenyon (as we have previously shown). On the other hand, there are absolutely insurmountable objections to the Late Date Theory [c. 1280 B.C.] on the basis of archaeological discovery.”¹⁹

“Although meager, yet the textual and the archaeological evidence regarding Jericho in Late Bronze IIA and B [1400-1200 B.C.] remarkably coincide, and once again the archaeological evidence suggests a conquest during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Even more conclusive, however, is the evidence that the city was not occupied during the mid-thirteenth century B.C., thereby precluding the option of the commonly accepted late date for the Exodus [c. 1280 B.C.].”²⁰

6:15-24 On the seventh day, the city walls collapsed. Yahweh then commanded them that the city and everything in it was to be set apart to Him or “put under the ban.” This phrase comes from the Hebrew word *herem*, which means “devoted to destruction” with the idea that it is “devoted to Yahweh.” The Israelites were to destroy everything as an offering to Yahweh (Lev. 27:29; Deut. 20:16-18).²¹

“A common rendering of *hrm* as ‘ban’ or ‘to place under the ban’ is inappropriate, because it does not carry the ideas of secular outlawry or ecclesiastical excommunication that these definitions carry. Lilley stresses that the essence of *hrm* ‘is an irrevocable renunciation of any interest in the object “devoted” and that it denotes ‘uncompromising consecration without possibility of recall or redemption.’

The concept of *hrm* is often found in sacred contexts, in which it has a strong connection with the idea of holiness. As such, these things were forbidden to common use, but rather were to be an ‘offering’ to the Lord. Leviticus 27:28-29 illustrates this well: ‘But nothing that a man owns and devotes [*hrm*, twice] to the Lord—whether man or animal or family land—may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted [*hrm*] is most holy to the LORD. No person devoted to destruction [*hrm*, twice] may be ransomed; he must be put to death.’ If something is dedicated or devoted to the Lord, it is ‘most holy.’ We find this idea in Joshua as well. In 6:18-19, the devoted things are holy (sacred): ‘But keep away from the devoted things [*hrm*], so that you will not bring about your own destruction [*hrm*] by taking any of them [*hrm*].

¹⁹ Gleason L. Archer, “Old Testament History and Recent Archaeology From Moses to David,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:506 (April-June 1970):108.

²⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, “Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (January-March 1972):42.

²¹ For a fuller and more detailed discussion see *The Extermination of the Canaanites* at www.knowingthebible.net.

Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction [*hrm*] and bring trouble on it.”²²

The only things Israel was allowed to spare were the metal, gold, silver, and vessels of brass and iron. These they were to place in the treasury of the tabernacle (Num. 31:54). The Israelites completely destroyed only three Canaanite cities west of the Jordan along with their populations, namely Jericho, Ai, and Hazor.

The reason Israel was not allowed to keep anything or to rebuild the city, as with many other cities, was that Jericho was to be a firstfruits offering to Yahweh (Lev. 23:9-14). The actual Firstfruits festival was to be celebrated the Sunday after Passover. Since Israel had just celebrated Passover, Jericho was given as a firstfruits offering to Yahweh around the time of the actual festival.

6:22-25 The fact that Rahab was spared just as the spies and Joshua had promised serves two purposes. It shows that Yahweh did spare Rahab for her faith and thus this is His true character. Also, it gives a very human face to Rahab the Canaanite as the city of Jericho filled with Canaanites is being destroyed. In Joshua 2, the narrator presents Rahab as a godly woman who wanted to be saved. In Joshua 6, the narrator presents a wicked city that was being destroyed. At the end of the chapter, the two perspectives are brought together. Where most cultures dehumanize and make the people they are destroying out to be monsters to justify their slaughter, the narrator does not. He forces the reader to deal with the tension between a wicked city that must be destroyed in obedience to Yahweh’s commands, but also they are human, the children of God, and some are willing to come to Yahweh in faith.

6:26-27 Joshua put a curse on the city forbidding anyone from rebuilding Jericho—at the cost of their children. To take this first fruits offering from Yahweh meant to lose your firstborn son. Jericho became a thanks offering to Yahweh for giving them the land and an act of trust that He would provide for them in their future conquest of the cities of Canaan. Later, in disobedience to Yahweh, Israel did rebuild the city of Jericho (Judg. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:5).

“...Jericho was not only the first, but the strongest town of Canaan, and as such was the key to the conquest of the whole land, the possession of which would open the way to the whole, and give the whole, as it were, into their hands. The Lord would give His people the first and strongest town of Canaan, as the first-fruits of the land, without any effort on their part, as a sign that He was about to give them the whole land for a possession, according to His promise; in order that they might not regard the conquest of it as their own work, or the fruit of their own exertions, and look upon the land as a well-merited possession which they could do as they pleased with, but that they might ever use it as a gracious gift from the Lord, which he had merely conferred upon them as a trust, and which He could take away again, whenever they might fall from Him, and render themselves unworthy of His grace. This design on the part of God would of necessity become very obvious in the case of so strongly fortified a town as Jericho, whose walls would appear impregnable to a people that had grown up in the desert and was so utterly without experience in the art of besieging or storming fortified places, and in fact would necessarily remain impregnable, at all events for a long time, without the interposition of God.”²³

²² David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 181.

²³ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 68.

“Joshua is perhaps best known as a book of war. Israel was at war with the Canaanites, but behind these human soldiers God was waging war against sin. Earlier in Israel’s history God was compared to a warrior (Ex. 14:14; 15:3; Deut. 1:30, 3:22; 20:4). But now Israel experienced His leadership in war as never before. God is constantly at war with sin because it is an affront to His holiness and because it destroys people whom He loves and desires to bless (cf. Rom. 6:23).”²⁴

²⁴ Thomas L. Constable. “A Theology of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 104-5.

B. Sin Hinders Israel's Victory (7:1–8:35)

The taking of Jericho records both the great triumph of Israel in trusting Yahweh and the failure of Achan in the midst of faith and triumph. The sin of Achan broke the covenant of Yahweh and the unity as a nation. Therefore, Israel could not count on the covenant blessings of Yahweh or the unity of the nation to gain success in what Yahweh had promised them. Yet the book of Leviticus taught Israel that they could come to Yahweh in repentance and, through a sacrifice, cleanse their camp of sin to once again gain access to Yahweh and His blessings. Thus, when Israel had cleansed the sin from their community with the removal of Achan, they were once again able to reap the blessing of Yahweh's presence and His promises of success in taking Ai.

7:1 The “but” introduces this story. In contrast to the obedience of the nation as a whole, one man, Achan, sinned, defiling the entire nation. Achan did not just steal; he stole from the first fruits that Israel had offered up to Yahweh. Though Joshua did not know it, the reader knows that there was no way Israel could succeed against Ai, no matter how small a city it was, when there was sin in their camp and Yahweh was not with them (Josh. 1:5-9).

7:2-5 Joshua and his men were overconfident and decided that Ai was small enough that they did not need to go against the city with all their fighting men. They made the conquest of Ai stagey and about numbers and not about the fact that Yahweh was with them and giving them victory. The fact that Ai drove them away easily showed that no matter how many men Israel had, if Yahweh was not with them, they would not succeed. Whereas Rahab had said that the Canaanites' hearts and courage were melting with fear (Josh. 2:11), now it was the Israelites' hearts and courage that were melting with fear (Josh. 7:5).

7:6-9 Joshua lost perspective as well, and his prayer sounded like Israel's complaints in the wilderness (Ex. 16:3; Num. 14:2-3). However, unlike the people, Joshua was also concerned for the glory of Yahweh and so went to Yahweh for answers, like Moses before him (Ex. 32:11-12; Num. 14:13; Deut. 9:28).

7:10-15 Yahweh informed Joshua that the reason He was not with them was that Israel had sinned, and Joshua was to bring all of Israel together and find the guilty party by tribe, clan, family, and, finally, individual. Though only one man had sinned, all of Israel suffered because of it. Our decisions and sins do not affect just ourselves but also the people around us. People often suffer the consequences for what a few do or the decisions of the few. Yahweh took the complete holiness of the nation seriously and knew that if the sin of Achan was not dealt with quickly, it would spread throughout the nation.

“This verse indicates the seriousness of the sin and God's outrage at it, because of the slow, climactic buildup of the language and the differing terms for sin, which become more specific with every word. First, the general word ‘sin’ (*hata*) is used. Next, the more specific term ‘violated’ is used (*abar*, lit., ‘crossed over [the line], transgressed’). Next, the specific sin is mentioned in two different ways: the Israelites had taken (*laqah*) some of the devoted things and they had stolen (*ganab*). They had also lied (*kihas*), and they had put (*sam*) the devoted things among their own things. Six verbs are thus used to describe Achan's (=Israel's) actions, four of which indicate sin in their own right and the other two do so in this context. The successive clauses are all linked by the word *gam*, usually translated ‘also.’

Here, the linking of the verbs and clauses in this way indicate a progressive buildup of specificity and, in the process, they describe the totality of what Achan did.”²⁵

7:16-21 Most likely, the high priest used the Urim and Thummim to determine the guilty party (Num. 27:21). When it came to Achan, he confessed that he was the one who had sinned. He had seen, desired, and taken what he wanted. These same three verbs are used in the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:6-7, 10) and in the sin of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-4, 8).

7:22-26 Stoning required that everyone participate in the execution. This ensured that no one would accuse another falsely, knowing that you had to throw the stones as well, and that all carried the responsibility of judgment. It also ensured that the people as a community were more committed to raising their children right and holding their neighbor accountable if they knew they would have to stone them for their failure to keep sin in check. The point was to make people take sin and the consequences for sin seriously. The burning of the body afterward emphasized the wickedness of his crime and the judgment (Lev. 20:14; cf. Deut. 13:15-16). Then they heaped stones upon his buried body. There is a connection between these stones and the erected stones on the bank of the Jordan River (Josh. 4). These two sets of stones are a memorial to Yahweh’s faithfulness to bless and to curse (Deut. 27-28).

Achan’s whole family was punished because they most likely had all approved of the sin. There is no way that Achan could have brought all of the spoils he had taken into the family tent without anyone noticing. Because he had sinned so defiantly against Yahweh (Num. 15:30, 35), he received the same judgment pronounced on the Canaanites (Deut. 13:16-17). Ironically and tragically, Achan could have taken anything he wanted in the next city of Ai. However, he lost sight of the generosity of Yahweh.

The story of Rahab serves as a foil to the story of Achan. Rahab was a “wicked” Canaanite who came to trust in a God she did not really know and gave up everything that she had in her city in order to become a part of the covenant community of Yahweh. In contrast, Achan is a Judahite who had seen the wonders of Yahweh, was a part of the covenant community of Yahweh, and yet risked all the blessings of the covenant in order to steal some silver from a pagan city. Thus, Rahab the Canaanite received the covenant blessings, and Achan the Israelite experienced the covenant cursings. This contrast serves to illustrate the point that the true descendant of the Abrahamic Covenant is not the biological descendant but the one who has faith (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

8:1-2 Now that the sin of Achan had been dealt with, Yahweh could go with Israel again into battle. Yahweh told Joshua to take all the men, unlike last time, and He would give them victory over Ai. Yahweh told Joshua that they were to do to Ai what they did to Jericho, except here they were allowed to take the goods and cattle of the city as their own. Again, if Achan had only obeyed Yahweh at Jericho, he would have been rewarded with what he had wanted and taken from Jericho.

8:3-23 Joshua used the previous attack and retreat of Israel to his advantage against Ai. By attacking and feigning a retreat, Ai would think that Israel was retreating again and would leave the city vulnerable for attack. Joshua was to hold out his javelin or curved sword as a sign of Yahweh’s victory in the same way that Moses held up his staff in the defeat of the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16).

²⁵ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 194.

8:24-29 Joshua obeyed everything that Yahweh had commanded. He destroyed the city, killed all the people, and killed and hanged the king on a tree until sunset (Num. 25:4; Deut. 21:22-23). He commemorated Yahweh's victory over the city by erecting a pile of stones at the former gate of the city. This type of exposure was known in both Egypt and Assyria as a wartime practice and found in connection to criminal penalties (Deut. 21:22). Yahweh had commanded that the body must not remain exposed overnight (Deut. 21:22-23). The fate of the king here and Achan previously shows that Yahweh does not favor His people when they blatantly disobey Him. This episode closely echoes Ex. 17:8-16, Joshua's first military success against Amalek after Israel's exodus out of Egypt.

"It is interesting to note again that this first victory in the Hill Country was in the region of Ai and Bethel, exactly where some of the most significant promises had been given to Abraham and Jacob hundreds of years earlier (...Genesis 13 and 28.10-22). In addition to the strategic nature of the region, these earlier promises may have played a part in Joshua's decision to begin his campaign precisely here. Joshua's bold move toward this part of the Hill Country may have been just what was needed to unify the Canaanites in the Bethel region. Up to this point they appear to have been in disarray in the face of the Israelite threat (Joshua 5.1). What better place to make their stand than here at the entrance to the strategic region of Bethel and the Central Benjamin Plateau?"²⁶

8:30-35 After their defeat of Jericho and Ai, Israel was now able to make the thirty-mile journey north to Shechem to carry out Yahweh's instructions concerning the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant in the land (Deut. 27). Shechem was the same city to which Abraham first came when he entered the land, where Yahweh had said that He would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7). There the Israelites erected two large stones covered in limestone and wrote the Law on them, most likely the Ten Commandments. They then erected a natural, uncut stone altar and sacrificed to Yahweh there (Ex. 20:22). On Mount Gerizim stood all the sons of Leah and Rachel, minus Reuben, who was cursed by Jacob (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4), and Zebulun, who was the youngest. These two and the sons of Jacob's maid-servants stood on Mount Ebal. As Israel faced the east, Gerizim would have been on the right and Ebal on the left. The practice of writing laws on large stones and pronouncing blessing and curses was a common practice in the ancient Near East when establishing treaties. All of Israel and the foreigners who lived there heard the reading of the Law.

"The story of the building of an altar on Mount Ebal and of the solemn reading of the blessings and curses of the covenant at that site is strategically important for understanding the message of the Book of Joshua... In unmistakably clear symbolism the reader is told that the right of possessing the Promised Land is tied to the proclamation of, and subjection to, God's covenant claims upon his people (and upon the world)."²⁷

²⁶ James M. Monson. *The Land Between*, p. 170.

²⁷ Marten H. Woudstra. *The Book of Joshua*, p. 144.

C. The Treaty with the Gibeonites (9:1–10:27)

Whereas Israel had been on the offense in defeating Jericho and Ai, the native tribes of Canaan now responded and put Israel on the defense. Before, the opposition came from individual cities, but now it came from coalitions of cities that feared they could not stand alone against Israel. However, the sin of Achan and Israel's defeat at Ai also showed that Israel could be defeated. The further consequences of Achan's sin on the whole community of Israel was that the Canaanites' fear of Israel was now diminished. The outworking of the curses of Deut. 28 were now happening because of Israel's disobedience.

Rather than forming a coalition, the Gibeonites chose to deceive Israel into making a treaty with them. The Gibeonites were successful because of Israel's failure to consult Yahweh first. This section shows the dangers of not seeking the advice of Yahweh in every situation that one faces.

"The following chapters introduce the transition from a victorious people of God whose occupation of the land could have been the relatively simple matter of defeating those already discouraged to an unending history of battle, bloodshed, and idolatry that would haunt Israel throughout its history. As in the opening chapters of Genesis, so also in the opening chapters of Israel's dwelling in the Promised Land, a single transgression has cosmic ramifications."²⁸

9:1-2 After the Israelite defeat of Jericho and Ai, all the kings of the different nations in Canaan formed an alliance against Israel. Where before they were at odds with each other, they had now found a common threat. However, as the coming conquest would show, this unification made no difference against Israel since Yahweh was with them.

9:3-13 Gibeon was a Hivite city seven miles south of Bethel. It was one of the largest cities in central Canaan. It later became a Levitical town (Josh. 18:25; 21:17), and eventually the tabernacle was pitched there until Solomon built the temple (1 Chr. 16:39; 21:29; 1 Kgs. 3:4-5).

The Gibeonites, fearful of Israel, decided to masquerade themselves as a distant nation who had traveled far in search of Israel in order to make a treaty with them. They knew that if they had a treaty with Israel, then there was no way Israel could attack them without bringing the wrath of their God upon them. The fact that the Gibeonites made it clear that they had reached their destination, where Joshua thought that they were merely passing through, shows how deceived Joshua and Israel were.

The Gibeonites are called Hivites, which was one of the groups to be destroyed. Ex. 34:11; Deut. 20:17; Josh. 3:10). Yahweh had also made it very clear that Israel was to make no treaties with the people of Canaan (Deut. 20:16-18).

9:14-15 Joshua and the other leaders of Israel, not knowing that they were Gibeonites, ate and made a treaty with them. Yahweh had not forbidden peace treaties with nations outside of Canaan (Deut. 20:11), but He had forbidden making treaties with the native tribes of Canaan (Ex. 23:32; 34:12; Num. 33:55; Deut. 7:2).

The narrator states clearly that the reason the Gibeonites were able to deceive Israel was that Israel failed to ask the advice of Yahweh (Num. 27:21; 1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 15:2; 18:4; 20:4; James 4:2). Though Israel was deceived, they still had sinned against Yahweh since they failed to go to Him for guidance.

²⁸ Richard S. Hess. *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 175.

9:16-21 When the leaders of Israel found out that they had been deceived, they went to Gibeon to confront them. The fact that it took them only three days to get to Gibeon emphasizes how deceived Israel was. The people of Israel wanted to kill the Gibeonites (Josh. 19:20, 26), but the leaders restrained them because of the oath that they had made. This conflict shows the Israelites' knowledge of the prohibition (Ex. 34:11-12; Deut. 20:15-18).

"Here the wilderness motif had been turned upside down, for in the wilderness the leaders were justified, while the congregation was guilty. Here the congregation is justified, while the leaders are at fault."²⁹

The people of the ancient Near East regarded all treaties as sacred agreements. If Israel violated this treaty, they would bring the judgment of Yahweh upon them. Joshua was wise to not break the treaty with Gibeon; even though they were deceived, Israel had still taken an oath in the name of Yahweh. King Saul would later put some of the Gibeonites to death. Yahweh responded to his actions by sending a famine on Israel as punishment (2 Sam. 21:1-2).

"The 'oath' was made in the name of the Lord. Consequently fidelity was owed, not to the Gibeonites, but to the Lord. The form of the oath called on the Lord to punish the Israelites if they failed to keep their agreement (cf. vv. 18-20). This explains why Israel felt bound to the treaty even though it had been made under false pretenses (cf. Gen 27:35; Ps 15:4)."³⁰

9:22-27 As punishment for the Gibeonites' deceiving Israel, Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the Levites in the tabernacle. The reference to the "house of God" referred to the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1; 1 Sam. 1:7) and in later years signified the temple (1 Chr. 22:2; 23:28; Ps. 135:2; Mic. 4:2; Ezra 1:4; 3:8). Servitude was the destiny of those cities that made their peace with the Israelites (Deut. 20:10-11). The Gibeonites were to serve only at sanctioned Israelite worship centers like Shiloh (Josh. 18:1) or Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39) and no Canaanite ones.

This was another mistake on Joshua's part because only the Levites were allowed to serve in the tabernacle for it was holy (Num. 3:10). By bringing these foreigners into the service of the tabernacle, the leaders of Israel violated the holiness of Yahweh, which greatly displeased Him (Ezek. 44:7).

"They are foreigners permitted to live, but their very presence is a living lesson for both Israel and for foreigners. Foreigners learn that they cannot trick their way into the people of Yahweh, even with pious confessions of faith. Israel learns the supreme danger which threatens its life and leadership when decisions are made without consulting Yahweh and when the Mosaic law is not followed."³¹

Later the Gibeonites appear to have been fully assimilated into the Israelite culture (Neh. 3:7; 7:25).

10:1-5 The Jebusites lived in and around Jerusalem, the ancient city of Salem (Gen. 14:18). Jerusalem means "the city of peace." *Adoni-Zedek*, meaning "lord of righteousness," was the title of the Jebusite kings as *Pharaoh* was of the Egyptian kings. The Amarna letters, writings from this time period, show that Jerusalem was the center of all the political activity in Canaan in the 1300s BC.

²⁹ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 104.

³⁰ Donald H. Madvig. "Joshua." In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 299.

³¹ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, pp. 104-5.

Jerusalem is mentioned the first time by this name although it has already been mentioned by the name Salem (Gen. 14:18) and the mountain that Yahweh will provide (Gen. 22:14). Jerusalem would not become a significant city in Israel until the reign of David (2 Sam. 5:6-19).

In Adoni-Zedek's fear of Israel, and now Gibeon, he made an alliance with five Amorite kings to attack Gibeon. The narrator sometimes uses the name Amorite to refer generally to all those who lived in the hill country of Canaan, since they were the largest and strongest of them all. The fact that Jerusalem lay only a few miles from Gibeon is probably what brought fear to Adoni-Zedek.

10:6-11 The Gibeonites cried out to Israel for help when the Amorite coalition came against them. The account here is a test of the validity of Israel's treaty with the Gibeonites. This is the last battle described in any detail in the book of Joshua.

Joshua was true to Israel's treaty and went to their rescue. Even though this was the first time Israel had gone against an alliance of city-states, Yahweh assured them that He would give them victory. In Josh. 10:9-15 the narrator alternates between the actions of Yahweh and the people of Israel to show that they were laboring together in the conquest of the land (1 Cor. 3:9). Yahweh honored the meaning of the name that He gave Jacob—Israel, "God fights" (Gen. 32:28). As usual, Yahweh used nature to defeat the enemies of Israel by bringing down large hailstones upon them.

"The crossing of the Jordan at high flood and the cyclonic hail storm at Aijalon are of special theological significance, for Baal was the great Canaanite storm god who was supposed to control the rain, the hail, the snow and the floods of Palestine. These episodes proved that Baal was as powerless before Yahweh in Palestine as he had been in the episode of the plagues in Egypt."³²

10:12-15 The narrator then stops to point out a significant event in the battle with Adoni-Zedek. The narrator states that on that day Joshua prayed to Yahweh, and Yahweh answered Joshua's prayer. There are several views of what is meant by the sun and moon standing still here, but it is significant that what amazed the narrator was not that the sun and moon stood still but that Yahweh obeyed a man (Josh. 10:14). The phrase *sama` beqol* means "to listen to the voice" or "to obey the voice." This is a much stronger way of expressing obedience than to say just that someone listened and responded. This phrase appears only three other times in the Bible with Yahweh as the subject. In Num. 21:3, Israel the nation is the object not an individual. Here, in Josh. 10:14, an individual is the object of the obedience. 1 Kgs. 17:22 is the only other time an individual is the object, when Yahweh obeyed Elijah and raised the boy from the dead at Elijah's request.³³

The first view is that Yahweh stopped the earth's rotation or tilted its axis to lengthen the day—that Yahweh literally made the sun and moon stand still so that the day lasted twice as long on that day. Some have said there might be evidence in ancient calendars of a long day and night, but there is no real evidence or consensus among historians and scientists. The sun and moon are the most significant things in nature such that if this really happened, there would be records of this from every culture. It is very unlikely that Yahweh would have altered the entire cosmos just to give the tiny people group of Israel a little longer day in the battle. Likewise, the fact that the narrator states the sun was over Gibeon in the east and the moon over the Valley of Aijalon in

³² J. L. Kelso, *Archaeology and Our Old Testament Contemporaries*, p. 53.

³³ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 250.

the west would put the time of day early in the morning, and there would have been no need for a request of a long day.

The second view is that Yahweh performed a local miracle, providing additional light for Israel either by making the light of the sun refract over Israel even after the sun had set or by providing His Shekinah glory over Israel in a sun-like way. The problem is that this is not how the language of the text is used. It states that the sun and moon stood still, not that there was more light for people to see.

The third view is that Yahweh made the sun and moon eclipse each other in a way that would impress the Amorites of His power. That the sun and moon were both visible in the same day would be seen as an omen or a sign to the Amorites. This view translates the verb *damam* in Josh. 10:12b, 13a “to be dark” instead of the usual translation “to cease” or “to be quiet.” This translation is not a good one because, first, it does not mean “to be dark” and does not account for the parallel between the verbs *damam* (“to cease”) and *‘amad* (“to stand”). There is no parallel between “to be dark” and “to stand.” Though the people of the ancient Near East would see an eclipse as an omen, the text does not specifically state that it was an eclipse, and according to the text it would have had to have been a full-day eclipse. Also, the Amorites could have seen it as a good omen for themselves rather than as a bad omen.

The fourth and most likely view is that the language is not meant to be taken literally, for it is poetry and is figurative of the sun and moon standing still.³⁴ It would mean this is a poem, where Yahweh commanded the sun and moon to figuratively to be stunned into motionless shock at what has just happened, that Yahweh obeyed a man. This is legitimate because the word *damam* can be translated “to be quiet,” as in silence due to an impending catastrophe. Thus, the narrator states figuratively that the sun and moon stood still in shock at the sight of the real battle that took place and that Yahweh listened to a man. All of nature is to stand in awe that the sovereign God of the universe listened to a man. This is like the modern figure of speech, that one watched the sun go down when speaking of a very real event in nature, even though the sun does not literally go down.

This understanding is based on a passage like Hab. 3:11, which states that the sun and moon stood still. These as well as many other poetic passages (Ps. 96:12; 98:8; Isa. 55:12; etc.) are interpreted figuratively, and no one tries to see a literal astronomical or geophysical phenomenon, yet people want to see the poetic passage in Joshua 10:12 as literal. Josh. 10:12-14 describes the literal and historical battle of Josh. 10:6-11 in the same way that Ex. 15 (specifically Ex. 15:8) describes the historical battle of Ex. 14:21-31 and Judg. 5 (specifically Judg. 5:20) does of the historical battle of Judg. 4:14-17.

The strength of this view is that not only does it deal with the language of the text on its own terms, but it also keeps the emphasis on the amazement that Yahweh obeyed a man, rather than a phenomenon of nature. The narrator really marvels less at the sign or miracle but rather at the fact that Yahweh heard and responded to the voice of a man and interceded so dramatically on behalf of Israel. Following is a good translation in light of this view.³⁵

¹²At that time, Joshua spoke to (i.e., petitioned) Yahweh, on the day of Yahweh’s giving the Amorites into the power of the sons of Israel. And [Yahweh] said in the sight of Israel,

³⁴ See David M. Howard. *Joshua*, pp. 238-249.

³⁵ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 248.

“O sun, over Gibeon stop,
O moon, over the valley of Aijalon (stop)!”

¹³So the sun stopped
and the moon, it stood still

Until [Yahweh] took vengeance [against] the nation of his enemies.

Is it not (all) written in the book of Jashar?

And the sun stood still
in the midst of the heavens,
And it did not hurry to go (down)
about a complete day.

¹⁴And there has not been (a day) like that day before it or after it, when Yahweh obeyed the voice of a man, for Yahweh fought for Israel.

The Book of *Jashar* (“the righteous one”) that is mentioned in Josh. 10:13 has never been found by archeologists. It seems to be a collection of poems and prayers (2 Sam. 1:18). Josh. 10:15 is out of chronological order and actually happened after Josh. 10:27.

10:16-27 The kings of the Amorites hid in the caves out of fear of Yahweh and Israel’s attack against them. Joshua trapped them in the caves and then executed them. The Israelites suffered no significant losses in the battle against the Amorites. In the ancient Near East, victors would often put one foot on the neck of their enemy to symbolize their subjugation over them. This was also called making your enemy your footstool (1 Kgs. 5:3; Ps. 8:6; 110:1).

D. The Southern and Northern Campaigns (10:28–12:24)

After Israel's conquest of Jericho and Ai, the narrator summarizes the rest of the conquest of Canaan. The actual details of the conquest do not seem as important here as the fact that Yahweh was faithful to Israel. Perhaps the lack of details is to emphasize how quickly Israel conquered the land. The total time of the conquest of the land was seven years.

10:28-39 Joshua destroyed seven other major cities in the southern region of Canaan. The fact that there are exactly seven cities mentioned in this section shows that it is meant to be a summary rather than a comprehensive list. Thus, these are stylized summaries, not detailed accounts. The summaries include the central territories but do not include the coastlands, where the Philistines lived (Josh. 13:2-6). Israel was never able to completely defeat the Philistines, who would pose a major threat in the books of Judges and Samuel.

The list is a chiastic parallelism that is constructed around Gezer; Israel did not defeat the city, only the army. This matches up with Judg. 1:29.

A Makkedah (king, city, people)

B Libnah (king, city, people)

C Lachish (city, people)

X Horam, king of Gezer

C' Eglon (city, people)

B' Hebron (King, city, people)

A' Debir (king, city, people)

10:40-43 The statement that Israel defeated “all” or “the whole” of the land does not mean every city but rather all the parts of the land and the kings and people of the cities listed. The purpose of Joshua's campaigns was to destroy the military might of the south, not necessarily to destroy every single city or occupy them yet. There are indications that point to longer-lasting campaigns (Josh. 11:18, 22; 13:2-6; 14:12; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13; 18:2-3; 19:47; 23:4-5, 7, 12-13). Though these later passages make it clear that the conquest was drawn out, involved hard work, and even had some failures, Josh 10:40-42 is interested in the broader picture, that Yahweh gave a sweeping and total victory to His people in fulfillment of His promises. The nature of the conquest of these cities differed from city to city. Later passages show that there were further efforts to subjugate the cities (e.g. Hebron: Josh. 15:13-14; Judg. 1:9-10, 20; Debir: Josh. 15:15-17; Judg. 1:12-13).

“But beyond inflicting immediate loss, this campaign achieved little else by itself—it was a sweep, not an occupation: ‘Joshua *returned* and all Israel with him, to the camp, to Gilgal’ (Joshua 10:15, 43). *Occupation* of the land, to live in it, keep livestock and cultivate crops in it, etc., was a far slower process, visible in part later in Joshua and in Judges.”³⁶

“According to Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), a philosopher of war, there are three principle military objectives in any war. First, the aggressor must destroy the military power of the enemy so he cannot continue or resume war. Second, he must conqueror the land of

³⁶ Kenneth A. Kitchen. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, p. 89.

the enemy so a new military force cannot arise from it. Third, he must subdue the will of the enemy. Joshua accomplished all three of these basic objectives.”³⁷

The emphasis is on the fact that Israel was obedient to Yahweh’s command to destroy the cities and that it was Yahweh who gave them victory. Even though Israel had made some mistakes, Yahweh still used them because their hearts desired Him and sought to obey Him to the best of their ability.

11:1-5 When king Jabin of Hazor in the north heard of the defeat of the southern coalition (Josh. 10:28-43), he organized a northern coalition to march against Israel. This coalition was greater than anything that Israel had faced so far in numbers of fighting men and weaponry. Hazor was the leading city in the north—170 acres of land and a population of 30,000 to 40,000 people.³⁸ The name Jabin may have been a title rather than a proper name (Judg. 4:2).

11:6-9 Once again, Yahweh commanded Joshua to attack the cities that were allied against Israel and promised to give them victory. And once again, Joshua and Israel obeyed Yahweh without hesitation. Yahweh would do all the killing, and all Israel had to do was hamstring the enemies’ horses.

“Hamstringing involved cutting the hamstring muscle of the horses’ legs. Hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots (vv. 6, 9) had two effects. The enemy could not use them again, and the Israelites could not use them or trust in them.”³⁹

11:10-15 Hazor was the third city after Jericho and Ai to be burned to the ground by Israel. The prominence of the city and its kings shows why it was singled out. The focus is first on the destruction or capture of the cities, then the plunder of the cities. Once again, the key to Israel’s success over the cities of Canaan was their faith in and obedience to Yahweh.

The meaning of the phrase “cities that stood on their mounds” (Josh. 11:13) is unclear.

11:16-20 The narrator makes it clear that Israel was successful in defeating every city that they went against; no one was left alive, and no city except Gibeon made treaties with Israel. The point is that Yahweh gave victory to Israel over every city they encountered just as He had promised. The only city that was left alive was Gibeon, and that was due to their failure to seek Yahweh, not to His inability to give them victory. Yahweh will always be with His people and provide for them what He has promised. The only thing that ever gets in the way of our experiencing His blessings is our lack of dependence on Yahweh and our sin.

“Here is a biblical lesson which has always been difficult for the people of God to learn. Deuteronomy commanded Israel to obey God, destroy the inhabitants, have no mercy, make no covenant, make no marriages (7:1-3). Such a command had a divine purpose. It removed the temptations to follow other gods. From the days of the Judges and especially from the period of Solomon onward, the great temptation was to make political alliances through covenants and political marriages between royal families (1 Kgs 11:1-8; 16:31; 20:30-43). To protect Israel against the major sin of idolatry, God commanded her not to show mercy to the

³⁷Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Joshua*, p. 49. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101, cited by Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, p. 46.

³⁸ Archaeologists calculate the population of walled cities in Canaan as about 200 people per acre.

³⁹ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Joshua*, p. 50.

enemy. To enable her to keep his commandment, God caused her enemies to fight her rather than seek mercy and peace.”⁴⁰

11:21-23 It is fitting that the record of Israel’s conquest ends with the Anakites (Num. 14). The specific mention of the defeat of the Anakites makes the point that the thing Israel feared most in Canaan, because of the testimony of the ten spies, was easily defeated by Yahweh as Israel trusted and obeyed Him (Num. 13:28). The point is that there was nothing to ever fear and that the older generation missed out on the blessing of the Promised Land due to their fear and rebellion, not because Yahweh was incapable or unfaithful.

Yahweh had promised Israel that He would bring them into the Promised Land, defeat their enemies, and give them rest (Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 21:44; 23:1). “Rest” here refers first to the physical peace from war (Josh. 11:23; 14:15; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; 1 Kgs. 8:56) and then to a physical and spiritual rest in the land (Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 21:44; 23:1; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; 1 Kgs. 8:56; Ps. 95).

For all practical purposes, the Israelites had now conquered all the land. It was not all the territory of land that Yahweh had promised, but it was all the major and strategic cities and territories of the land. Israel had subdued enough of the land of Canaan that it could now be called theirs, just as Yahweh had promised Moses (Ex. 23:27-33; Deut. 7:22). This is the first time in the Bible that the Promised Land is called “the land of Israel” (Josh. 11:22). This title shows that not only was Israel victorious over the majority of Canaan, but also that Yahweh was true to His promise to give them a land of their own (Gen. 12:1-4). Now that the major battles had been won, it was left to the individual tribes to finish conquering all the cities and people in their allotted territories (Ex. 23:27-33; Deut. 7:22; Josh. 13:1; Judg. 1:1).

“The taking of the *whole* land does not imply that all the towns and villages to the very last had been conquered, or that all the Canaanites were rooted out from every corner of the land, but simply that the conquest was of such a character that the power of the Canaanites was broken, their dominion overthrown, and their whole land so thoroughly given into the hands of the Israelites, that those who still remained here and there were crushed into powerless fugitives, who could neither offer any further opposition to the Israelites, nor dispute the possession of the land with them, if they would only strive to fulfill the commandments of their God and persevere in the gradual extermination of the scattered remnants.”⁴¹

“The error of contrasting Joshua’s rapid campaigns (misread as permanent conquest) with slower occupation in Judges 1 misses the point entirely. And how often the proponents of this theory omit even to read Joshua 13! Thirty-one dead kinglets (Joshua 12) were not a conquest in depth, merely a cropping of the leadership. At the end of Joshua’s career, there still remained ‘very much land to be possessed’ (13:1)—both the areas listed (13:2-6) largely unreachéd by Joshua’s vigour, as well as the in-depth settlement of most of the districts already raided. That process was more painfully slow, even in Joshua’s lifetime; cf. the remarks in Joshua 18:2-3 (Joshua’s rebuke), besides the frustrated efforts recorded here and there (Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:12, 16).”⁴²

⁴⁰ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 130.

⁴¹ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 125.

⁴² Kenneth A. Kitchen. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, pp. 90-91.

12:1-24 The narrator then gives a summary of all the major kings and cities that were defeated in the conquest. Sihon and Og were the first Canaanite kings defeated on the east side of the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses before Israel entered the Promised Land. The rest of the kings mentioned were on the west side of the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua. Many of the names listed here appear also in the Amarna letters, confirming the historicity of the Bible's account.

"The description was not complete. Shechem is not mentioned, and the hills of Ephraim are sparsely represented, as is the territory north of Hazor. Completeness is not the object. The writer seeks to compile a list that will impress the readers with the greatness of the feat of God in working for Israel and of the greatness of the leadership of Joshua in following the example of Moses and completing the task first given to Moses. Still, the writer is aware that much remains to be done."⁴³

Joshua 6-12 is the central part of the book. Israel could not take the land without Yahweh's presence. Not once did Israel win a battle due to their superior force. Yahweh worked in different ways. It was not just a matter of ridding the land of the Canaanites and taking the land. It was also sacred exercises to teach Israel to trust in the power and faithfulness of Yahweh.⁴⁴ The Israelites were not inheriting the land due to any merit of their own (Deut. 9:5). The land had been defiled by the sin of the Canaanites and had to be cleansed of them and their sin.

⁴³ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 139.

⁴⁴ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 287.



III. Apportioning the Promised Land Inheritance (13:1–24:33)

The rest of the book of Joshua records how Joshua divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. The major emphasis of this final division of the book is on Yahweh as the great land owner and land giver. The detailed boundary descriptions for each of the tribal lands and lists of cities emphasize the fact that Yahweh was in control of the land of Canaan all along and that He has the authority to give it to Israel. The great detail also shows the importance of recording each tribe's land inheritance, which demonstrates Yahweh's faithfulness to His promises. The list of all the tribes receiving their land inheritance also emphasizes the unity of the nation.

There is a concentric chiastic parallelism that emphasizes the tabernacle (tent of meeting) being moved to Shiloh, which was centrally located in the land of Israel. This chiastic parallelism emphasizes that Yahweh was dwelling in the midst of His people as their sovereign king but also among them as a relational God.

A Transjordan allotment for two and a half tribes (13:8-11)

B The principles of the division (14:1-5)

C Caleb's inheritance (14:6-15)

D The lot of Judah and Joseph (15:1-17:18)

X The Tent of Meeting taken to Shiloh and the apportioning of the land (18:1-10)

D' The lot of the seven remaining tribes (18:11-19:48)

C' Joshua's inheritance (19:49-51)

B' Designating cities of refuge (20:1-6)

A' Cities of refuge and Levitical cities (20:7-21:42)

A. The Land East and West of the Jordan River (13:1-19:51)

Yahweh assigned each tribe very specific territories, according to the surrounding mountains, valleys, and bodies of water. Not only does this show how important every detail of Israel's inheritance is to Him but also how literal He was when He made His specific promises to Israel. Thus one can expect Him to fulfill His future promises literally as well.

13:1-6 Joshua was probably in his eighties at this time. Now that the land was subdued, it was left up to the individual tribes to conquer the remaining cities and peoples in their territory (Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). The nation of Israel had been faithful to Yahweh in their conquest of the land, and Yahweh had been faithful to Israel in giving them the land He had promised. Now the individual tribes needed to demonstrate faith in conquering their allotment.

“Resisting the temptation to skip over this section of Joshua [chs. 13—21] can result in an appreciation of important features of God’s covenant with Israel. Beyond the obvious detail of the content of these chapters and the means by which God blessed those who remained faithful in the conquest of the land, this passage also addresses the question why the land formed so significant a part of God’s promises to the patriarchs and remained a key feature of the covenant.”⁴⁵

The land mentioned here is all the land west of the Jordan River. Yahweh specifically mentioned the Philistines because they were not Canaanites but were included in the driving out process.

⁴⁵ Richard S. Hess. *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 53-54.

The Philistines were a group of people who had migrated from the Aegean region of Europe, came across the Mediterranean, and displaced the Canaanites from the coastal plains of Canaan. The Philistines were a small group at this time but later grew into a very powerful enemy of Israel during Saul and David's reigns. The "Shihor" is probably the brook of Egypt—the modern Wadi el Arish—marking the southwestern boundary of the Promised Land.

13:7-14 Moses had assigned the Transjordan region east of the Jordan River to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They had requested to settle there even though that land was not previously mentioned as being viable for settling (Num. 32). This included the land from north of the Sea of Galilee to the middle half of the Dead Sea.

"The Transjordanian tribes receive a disproportionate amount of attention in this book that records the Conquest and division of the land *west* of the Jordan (cf. 1:12-15; 4:12; 12:1-6; 13:8-33; 22:1-34). The author was eager to uphold the unity of the Twelve Tribes in spite of the geographic separation and an undercurrent of feeling that only the land west of the Jordan was truly the Promised Land."⁴⁶

13:15-23 Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob's sons, received the southern region of the Transjordan.

13:24-28 Gad received the central region of the Transjordan.

13:29-33 Manasseh received the northern region of the Transjordan.

14:1-5 Eleazar the high priest, Joshua, and the leaders of the tribes determined the division of the land by the size of the tribes (Num. 26:52-56) and the casting of lots. The casting of lots was done through the Urim and Thummim as instructed by Yahweh (Ex. 28:15-30). The Urim and the Thummim were two objects intended for determining the divine will of Yahweh and were stored in some kind of pocket in the breastplate. No one is sure about their size or shape or the material from which they were made. The priest would ask Yahweh a question and then cast the objects on the ground to receive an answer (1 Sam 14:36-42). It is believed that the Urim represented the answer "no" and the Thummim represented "yes." This seems to fit with the best understanding scholars have that the Hebrew words *Urim* and *Thummim* mean is "curses and perfections." The Urim and the Thummim seemed to have fallen out of use after the Davidic period, when Yahweh raised up the office of the prophets and began to speak through them.

The frequent mention of Levi's receiving no land inheritance reminds us of their ancestors' sin of killing the Shechemites and the consequence of not being allowed to have a land inheritance (Gen. 34; 49:5-7). However, the Levites redeemed themselves when they stood next to Moses during the golden calf incident and received the priesthood when the rest of Israel lost it (Ex. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12-13). They were given priestly cities scattered throughout Israel (Num. 35).

14:6-15 Before Judah was assigned their land, Caleb from the tribe of Judah came forward asking for the land that Moses had promised him since he was one of the two spies (Joshua the other) who had said Israel could take the land of Canaan with Yahweh (Num. 14:26-38; Deut. 1:36). Caleb asked for the very land that was not yet conquered and contained the giants that Israel had feared after spying out the land (Num. 13:28-29). Joshua gave him Hebron, a major and powerful Canaanite city. Caleb shows that having faith in Yahweh and doing amazing things in His name is possible at any age.

⁴⁶ Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua." In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 318.

“It would have been natural for Caleb to ask for a ‘soft spot’—a portion of land already conquered where he could settle down and spend the rest of his life raising a few vegetables or flowers. Instead, at 85, he asked for the very section that had struck terror into the hearts of the ten spies.”⁴⁷

“Joshua 14 thus sets forth two major points, which continue to have value for the people of God. Life in all its dimensions is to be lived according to the plans set forth by God, not by the greedy, selfish plans designed by man. Blessing comes ultimately to the man who totally follows God.”⁴⁸

15:1-12 The tribe of Judah received its inheritance first since it was the head tribe over the nation of Israel. Judah received the southernmost and largest part of Israel. The tribe of Simeon received only a few cities scattered within Judah because of their ancestors’ sin in killing the Shechemites (Gen. 34; 49:5-7).

15:13-19 This second passage about Caleb’s inheritance (the first was Josh. 14:6-15) explains his further acquisition of Debir, another city that originally had been taken by Joshua (Josh. 10:38-39). The assumption is that it had fallen back into the possession of the Canaanites.

Caleb went and conquered without hesitation the land that was given to him with the same determination and faith in Yahweh that he had demonstrated when he stood before Israel forty years earlier, declaring that they could take the land because Yahweh was with them (Num. 13-14).

In order to ensure that a godly man would marry his daughter Acsah, Caleb issued the test that anyone who could conquer Kiriath Sepher would get her hand in marriage. Caleb knew that the only way a person could conquer the city was if Yahweh was with them (Num. 14:36:45). Likewise, their conquering of the city showed their trust in and obedience to Yahweh. Othniel, Caleb’s nephew, conquered the city with the same determination and faith in Yahweh that Caleb had demonstrated. The Hebrew here could read that Caleb was the brother of Othniel or Kenaz. The text makes it clear that Othniel is the son of Kenaz. Caleb could not be the brother of Othniel and Kenaz’s son, for several times the Bible says that Caleb was the son of Jephunneh (Num. 13:6; 14:6, 30, 38; 26:65; 32:12; 34:19; Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:6, 13, 14; 15:13; 21:12; 1 Chr. 4:15; 6:56). Thus Othniel must be the nephew of Caleb since Othniel’s father was Kenaz.

Caleb continues to show his desire to provide for and protect his daughter by giving her springs to go along with the land that he has given her. In the ancient world, springs symbolized fertility, blessings, and a future. Caleb demonstrates here the love and protection that men should give their wives and daughters. Though this does not seem significant now, later, in the book of Judges, women will be treated worse and worse. The climax is with Jephthah, who will take away not only his daughter’s ability to be married and have children and a future but will take her life as well (Judg. 11:30-39). The book of Judges ends with the nation of Israel approving the kidnapping and rape of 600 Israelite women (Judg. 19-21).

⁴⁷ Henry Jacobsen. *Claiming God's Promises*, p. 100. See John Cawood, “The Godly Features of Caleb,” *Confident Living* 44:10 (November 1986): 53-55.

⁴⁸ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 175.

15:20-63 Judah received the southern part of Israel, from the northern part of the Dead Sea to Kadesh Barnea in the Negev. Judah was unable to conquer the Jebusites living within the city of Jerusalem, which would later be the capital of Israel starting with King David (2 Sam. 5).

16:1-10 Joseph is mentioned next since he received the double land inheritance from Jacob. Jacob adopted both of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, when he blessed them (Gen. 48:5). Thus they became a part of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49). Ephraim received a small allotment of land north of the Dead Sea.

17:1-6 The daughters of Zelophehad had previously gone to Moses and asked for a tribal inheritance since their father had had no sons. Moses inquired of Yahweh, who granted that Israelite women could inherit land if they had no brothers (Num. 27:1-11; 36). The narrator shows that Yahweh was faithful to His promise in giving them land.

17:7-13 In addition to the other half of Manasseh, who received land on the east side of the Jordan, this half of Manasseh received a large portion of land in the central part of Israel on the west side of the Jordan.

17:14-18 Unlike Caleb, Ephraim complained that they did not have enough land. It seems that they were only looking at the land that was easy to conquer and clear. Joshua told them they could have more land if they conquered their land and cleared the trees, which would require hard work and trust in Yahweh.

18:1-10 The tabernacle was brought to Shiloh to be set up as Yahweh had stated (Deut. 12:11). The tabernacle also stood at Gilgal (Josh. 5:10; 10:15, 43), Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 9-10), Bethel (Judg. 20:18-28; 21:1-4), Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3), Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:9-10), Gilgal (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-10; 15:10-15), Nob (1 Sam. 17:54; 21:1-9), and finally at Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39-40; 21:29; 1 Kgs. 3:4; 2 Chr. 1:3). Solomon's temple in Jerusalem then replaced it (1 Kgs. 8). For whatever reason, Israel decided to delay the assignment of the land to the remaining seven tribes. Joshua rebuked them and assigned a special group of men to finish the assignment of the land.

18:11-28 Benjamin received a small allotment just north of Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

19:1-9 Simeon received only a few cities scattered within Judah because of their ancestors' sin in killing the Shechemites (Gen. 34; 49:5-7).

19:10-23 Zebulun and Issachar received small allotments in the northern part of Israel.

19:24-39 Asher and Naphtali received large strips of land in the northern part of Israel.

19:40-48 Dan received land in the coastal plain of Israel just north of Judah. Dan failed to conquer the people in this territory and so moved north to settle in land less challenging (Judg. 17-18). The Amorites in the coastal plains (Judg. 1:34) drove the Danites into the hills. This led to a northward migration of a portion of the tribe of Dan, near the northern part of Naphtali (Judg. 17-18).

19:49-51 Just as Caleb received special land inheritance for his faithfulness to Yahweh and his leadership over Israel, so also Joshua receives a special land inheritance.

"Caleb and Joshua were the two faithful spies who believed God was able to give Israel the land (Num 14:6-9, 30). The receiving of their inheritances frames the story of the dividing of the land among the nine and a half tribes, with Caleb's at the beginning [14:6-15] and

Joshua's at the end. Caleb and Joshua are living examples of God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises made more than forty years earlier.”⁴⁹

“The gift of the land brought blessings not only to the nation as a whole and to the individual tribes. It also brought blessing to the faithful leader. God commanded Israel to reward the individual for his faithfulness. Thus the Deuteronomic understanding of blessing and curse is expressed not only on the corporate, but also on the individual level. This, too, stands as a source of encouragement to Israel through the years as many of her people become dispersed from the main body of the people of God.”⁵⁰

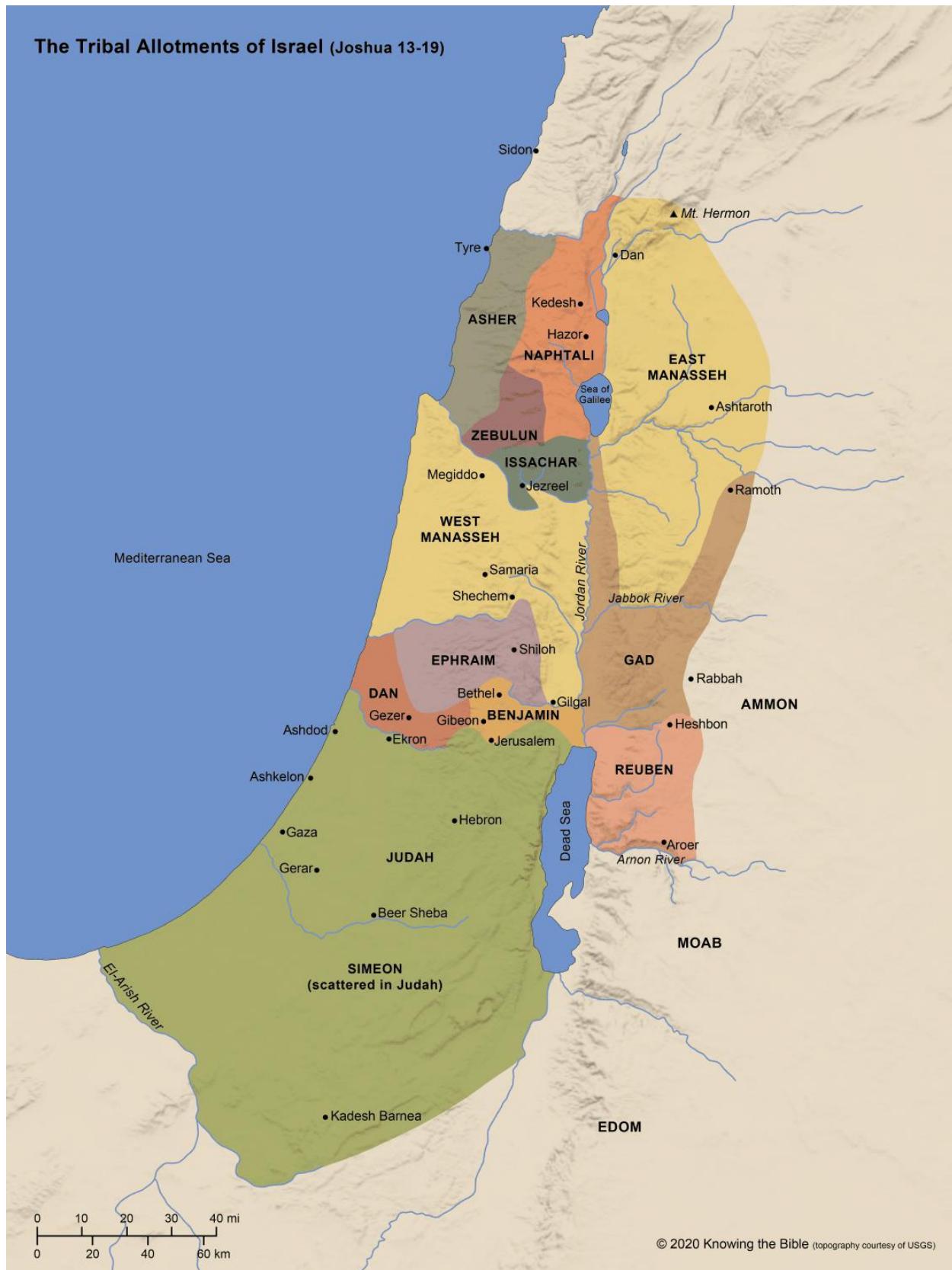
“Readers of this section of the text (chs. 14—19) notice that the writer gave much more space to the first tribes he described and progressively less attention to the remaining tribes. There seem to be several reasons for this. First, he gave the tribes of Judah and Joseph special attention because Judah and Joseph received Jacob's blessing and birthright respectively. This made them the preeminent tribes among the others. Second, Judah and Joseph therefore became more significant in the history of Israel as the nation matured, so the historical value of their territories was greater than that of less influential tribes. Benjamin likewise became quite important, and this is probably a reason the writer gave his territory some attention. Third, the writer clearly did not intend that the listing of tribal boundaries and towns should be complete. His record of the allotment that each tribe received, considering all the tribes together, seems intended more to stress the faithfulness of God in giving Israel what He had promised. This purpose is especially clear in the listing of Simeon's towns. Similarly Moses chose only selected laws to record in Exodus through Deuteronomy to make certain impressions on the reader, not that these were the only laws that God gave His people.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Donald H. Madvig. “Joshua.” In *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, p. 324.

⁵⁰ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 208.

⁵¹ Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Joshua*, pp. 64-65.





B. The Levitical Cities (20:1–21:42)

Though the Levites did not inherit land in the same way that the other tribes of Israel did, they were assigned cities scattered throughout the twelve tribes.

20:1-9 The tribal leaders then assigned the Levitical cities of refuge, according to the instructions that Moses received from Yahweh (Num. 35). There were three on the west side of the Jordan River and three more on the east side of the Jordan River. In a world without police and prisons, these cities helped maintain justice in the land. If someone was guilty of murder, it fell to the victim's closest relative (the avenger of blood) to seek out the murderer and to execute him according to the Mosaic Law. The murderer, seeking safety from the avenger of blood, would flee to one of these cities to be tried by the Levites living there. If they found the person guilty of premeditated murder, then they would remove him from the city and hand him over to the avenger of blood for execution. If the person was guilty of manslaughter, then he was required to live in the city until he or the high priest died (Deut. 19:1-13; Num. 35). As long as he lived in the city, he was safe from the avenger of blood, but being trapped in the city was also his consequence for taking a life. This practice ensured that there was justice for both parties. In the ancient Near East the avenger of blood would often kill the murderer and their family without ever considering the case.

When the high priest died, his blood became atonement for the murderer, who was then set free from the confines of the city. Likewise, the avenger of blood was not allowed to touch him, or he would be considered guilty of murder.

21:1-42 The tribes also had to set aside forty-two additional cities for the priests and Levites to inhabit (Num. 35:1-8). The cities were assigned to the three clans of the Levites. The priests (Aaron's descendants) were given thirteen cities within the tribal territories of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The rest of the Kohathites (Aaron was also a descendant of Kohath) were given ten cities in Ephraim, Dan, and western Manasseh. The Gershonites were given thirteen cities in Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and eastern Manasseh. The Merarites were given twelve cities in Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

21:43-45 The narrator makes a very significant point that Yahweh had been faithful to Israel in giving them all the land that He had promised. Though not every square mile had been conquered and subdued, they had conquered enough cities for the land to be considered theirs (Josh. 11:22). As long as they kept their faith in Yahweh, they would be secure and none of their enemies could harm them.

“The Canaanites, it is true, were yet in possession of some parts of the country, but they were so far subdued, that they gave them [the Israelites] no serious molestation, and they were enabled to sit down in their possessions in the enjoyment of comparative rest and quiet. They had as much of the land in actual possession as they could occupy; and as they increased God enabled them, according to his promise, Ex. 23.30, to carry forward the work of extermination, and obtain further room for their settlement. All the assurances given to Joshua, ch. 1.5, of a successful tide of victories during his life, were accomplished, and as to the subsequent annoyance and occasional prevalence of their enemies, it was owing solely to the supineness and infidelity of Israel. So long as they were obedient, they were uniformly triumphant and prosperous.”⁵²

⁵² George Bush. *Notes on Joshua*, p. 189.

“Notwithstanding the fact that many a tract of country still remained in the hands of the Canaanites, the promise that the land of Canaan should be given to the house of Israel for a possession had been fulfilled; for God had not promised the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites, but only their gradual extermination (Ex. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22). And even though the Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole of the Promised Land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num. xxxiv. 1-2, never conquering Tyre and Sidon for example, the promises of God were no more broken on that account than they were through the circumstance, that after the death of Joshua and the elders his contemporaries, Israel was sometimes hard pressed by the Canaanites; since the complete fulfillment of this promise was inseparably connected with the fidelity of Israel to the Lord.”⁵³

“The meaning of the Deuteronomist’s rest theology is clearly seen here [in v. 44]. Rest is peace, absence of enemies and war. See Josh 1:12-18. The verse is a counterpart to chap. 12, which concluded the first section of the book. It is the fulfillment of God’s promise in Exod 33:14. Both major sections of the book thus end with a statement about God’s faithfulness in totally defeating the enemy.”⁵⁴

⁵³ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 216.

⁵⁴ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 235.

C. Joshua's Final Acts and Death (22:1–24:33)

The book of Joshua ends with the emphasis on the importance of remaining faithful to Yahweh in much the same way that the Torah ended with this emphasis in Deuteronomy (Josh. 22:5, 16, 18-19, 25, 29, 31; 23:6, 8, 11; 24:14-16, 18, 21, 23-24). This emphasis grows out of the record of Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel in the same way that Deuteronomy emphasized this.

“Each of the final three chapters describes a single event. At first glance, these events seem to be a random collection of leftovers: a dispute between the tribes about an altar, a farewell address, and another covenant ceremony. However, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that they all focus on a single matter, the proper worship of Israel’s God—how to offer it and what will happen if Israel does not do so.”⁵⁵

“The final three chapters all deal with farewells of sorts: (1) Joshua bade farewell to the Transjordan tribes, dismissing them to their inheritances east of the Jordan (chap. 22); (2) he bade farewell to the entire nation in a speech urging them to follow the Lord (chap. 23); and (3) he again bade farewell to the nation and led them in a covenant renewal ceremony, at a different place and with different emphases (chap. 24). Even the final section of the book, where three short burial notices are found, is, in effect, the author’s farewell to his readers, assuring them that everything had been completed faithfully and in order (24:29-33).”⁵⁶

22:1-9 Joshua commended and rewarded the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh for honoring their promises to Moses to help conquer the land (Num. 32). He then sent them home to the east side of the Jordan River where Moses had given them land.

22:10-12 The Transjordan tribes had built their own replica of the bronze altar found in the tabernacle (Josh. 22:28) in their territory. However, Yahweh had made it clear that He did not allow altars in the land that He had ordained (Deut. 12:1-14). The other tribes were so offended by this that they were ready to go to war against the Transjordan tribes. This is what Yahweh had commanded if any tribe violated His Law and led others astray (Deut. 13:12-18). The term *ml* is used to refer to a wife’s adultery (Num. 5:12-13). It is used seven times in Josh. 22 when the western tribes accused the eastern tribes of unfaithfully building and altar.

“It is striking to notice one of the terms used of the Cisjordan tribes here. Even though they were only nine and one-half tribes, they are called by an inclusive term in v. 12: ‘the whole assembly of Israel’ (see also v. 16, and ‘the whole community of Israel’ vv. 18,20). The two and one-half Transjordan tribes are clearly not included in this designation, that is, they were not considered to be part of the Israelite assembly, at least at this point. A survey of the rest of the chapter reveals that the narrator and the speakers consistently maintain such a distinction until the misunderstanding about the altar has been explained in a satisfactory manner (by v. 30). Beginning with v. 30, there is no reference again to such all-inclusive terms as “all Israel” 13 or ‘the whole community,’ only to the more general terms, ‘the Israelites’ or ‘the community.’”

The significance of these careful distinctions is that the story is being presented in order to highlight two facts about the altar: (1) the grave danger posed by its existence and (2) its potential for irreparably dividing the nation. The Cisjordan tribes had already inherited their lands in Canaan proper, which was where Abraham had been promised his lands (Gen 17:8).

⁵⁵ Richard S. Hess. *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 287.

⁵⁶ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 401.

The Transjordan tribes' inheritance lay outside of Canaan, so if they were to be considered truly a continuing part of Israel, they needed to demonstrate this clearly.”⁵⁷

22:13-34 Before going to war, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest (Num. 25; 31), chose to go to the Transjordan tribes and ask them why they had built the altar. The Transjordan tribes responded by saying that they had not built the altar to make sacrifices but as a memorial to remind them and the western tribes that they shared in Yahweh's inheritance even though they were separated by the Jordan River. This satisfied Phinehas and the western tribes, and they allowed the memorial to stand. Both sides sinned against Yahweh here. The Transjordan tribes did not trust Yahweh for Israel's unity and placed it instead in a non-ordained memorial. The western tribes sinned because they allowed the other tribes to keep the altar even though they knew Yahweh had forbidden it. This resulted in the weakening of the tribal unity and allegiance to Yahweh. Though this memorial is never mentioned again in the Bible, it is unlikely that it served any good over the years since Yahweh had forbidden it.

23:1-16 Joshua gave the first of his two farewell speeches. He reminded Israel of the faithfulness of Yahweh and how He had fulfilled His promises to them, bringing them to the land and giving them victory. He challenged them to remain faithful to Yahweh so that the rest of the Canaanites could be driven out of the land. Unlike Moses' final speeches in Deuteronomy, Joshua did not list the sins and failures of Israel since as a whole they had been faithful to Yahweh. However, he did warn that if they transgressed the Law, then Yahweh would discipline them.

“For Israel, Yahweh claimed to fulfill all the functions for which other nations needed a multitude of gods. The problem was that Israel could never really come to believe the claim totally. She constantly sought the favors of the gods who had claimed to give fertility to the land long before Israel entered it or the gods who seemed at the moment to have military power.”⁵⁸

“If Israel does not do her part, then God will not do his. Here is the danger of freedom. God seeks man's free response of love. God does his part to deserve and receive such love. God does not force his attentions upon man. But the man who ignores God's claims finds God's punishment.”⁵⁹

24:1-13 Joshua then gave the second of his two farewell speeches.

“Because of the similarities between the two speeches, some scholars argue that these chapters represent two versions of only one event or speech, one or both of which are Deuteronomistic compositions dating many centuries later. However, significant differences exist between the two that must be taken into account. (1) The first speech is very pastoral, urging Israel to keep the law and to follow the Lord and warning it against turning away from him; as such, it is oriented to the future in significant ways. The second speech, while doing much of the same thing, reviews the past record of God's faithfulness to Israel in a much more systematic way. (2) The first speech was apparently delivered to the leaders of Israel (see v. 2), while the second appears to have been to all the nation (24:1-2). 31 (3) The first speech apparently was delivered at Shiloh, which had been the Israelites' religious center for some time (see 18:1, 8-10; 19:51; 21:1), while the next was delivered at Shechem (24:1). (4)

⁵⁷ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, pp. 406-407.

⁵⁸ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 255.

⁵⁹ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 255.

The first is less formal than the second, since it consists entirely of Joshua's words of exhortation and admonition to his audience while the second is followed by the people's response and by a covenant renewal ceremony.”⁶⁰

Joshua brought Israel to Shechem to renew the covenant with Yahweh, the same location Yahweh had brought Abraham when he first entered the land (Gen. 12:7). This is also where Jacob had buried his idols and built an altar (Gen. 33:19-20; 35:1-4).

Joshua reviewed the history of Yahweh's great acts on Israel's behalf. First, Joshua reminded them that Yahweh had chosen to make Abraham into a great nation even while he was still worshiping idols (Gen. 12:1-4). It was not by Abraham's merit that he had been chosen but by the grace of Yahweh. Second, he reminded Israel of how Yahweh, through His own efforts, defeated the Egyptians with plagues and delivered Israel from Egypt in the exodus even though they were worshiping other gods at the time (Ex. 14-15). Third, he reminded them of how Yahweh gave Israel victory over the Amorites even though they were complaining in the wilderness (Num. 21). And fourth, he declared how Yahweh faithfully brought them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land and defeated all the Canaanites before them (Josh. 3). Seventeen times Yahweh said “I” did such-and-such for you. The emphasis is clearly on Yahweh's great acts for Israel.

24:14-18 Joshua urged Israel to make a choice of which god they were going to truly commit to. They needed to understand that worshiping Yahweh meant getting rid of all other gods and idols. Yahweh has always emphasized our choice to serve Him, but it is important that one make a conscious choice. Joshua also made it clear that following Yahweh is not an easy thing to do and requires constant perseverance. The people committed themselves to following and obeying Yahweh.

The people responded with a great affirmation that they would never forget what Yahweh had done for them and that they would always follow and obey Him. However, the people as a whole did not always obey Yahweh's commands (Josh. 6:17-19; 7:1) or follow through on their obligation to drive out the Canaanites from the land (Josh. 11:22; 13:1; 15:63; 16:120; 17:12-13). As always in the Bible, we see the tension between the words and actions of Yahweh's people.

24:19-24 Joshua then warned that they as a people would not keep obeying Yahweh but would eventually go after other gods. Yet Yahweh was a jealous God who desired their complete covenant loyalty and would not share them with any other gods or forgive this sin. The key to understanding these statements comes in two other statements that Joshua made, which affirmed two of Yahweh's defining characteristics: He is a holy God and a jealous God; He wants their undivided attention and will not share them with any other god. Joshua's response to the people was that they were unable to serve Yahweh properly, which communicates the absolute holiness of Yahweh and His jealousy. Forgiving His people was not an absolute, timeless statement, but His forgiveness depended on whether or not His people forsook Him for other gods.

24:25-31 From time to time, Israel was to renew their covenant with Yahweh as a constant reminder of their allegiance to Him (Josh. 8). Once again, a monument was erected as a memorial and remembrance of their commitment to Yahweh and of His faithfulness to them.

⁶⁰ David M. Howard. *Joshua*, p. 416.

24:32-33 Joshua died shortly after the renewal of the covenant. He was 110 years old, the same age as Joseph when he died (Gen. 50:26). Yahweh used Joshua as He had used Joseph in delivering His people. There is no record of sin in the Bible for either Joseph or Joshua.

“Joshua’s epitaph was not written on a marble gravestone. It was written in the lives of the leaders he influenced and the people he led. They served Yahweh. Here is the theological climax to the theme introduced in 22:5 and repeated like a chorus in 23:7, 16; 24:14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24. Ironically, the minister of Moses brought the people to obey Yahweh, while Moses saw only the perpetual murmuring and rebellion of the people (cf. Deut. 31:27). Even Moses had to die outside the Land of Promise.”⁶¹

Eleazar’s death and burial were also significant because he was Israel’s high priest and co-leader with Joshua during this period of history. Eleazar was a lot more important to Israel than the brief references to him might suggest.

“Three burials—it seems a strange way to end the Book of Joshua! But these three peaceful graves testify to the faithfulness of God, for Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar once lived in a foreign nation where they were the recipients of God’s promise to take His people back to Canaan. Now all three were at rest *within* the borders of the Promised Land. God kept His word to Joshua, Joseph, Eleazar—and to all Israel. And by this we are encouraged to count on the unfailing faithfulness of God.”⁶²

“After Joshua, the history of Israel goes downhill [until David]. Joshua 24 thus marks the high point of Israel’s history, the full realization of her identity as people of God.”⁶³

⁶¹ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 283.

⁶² Donald K. Campbell. "Joshua." In *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 142.

⁶³ Trent C. Butler. *Joshua*, p. 269.

Conclusion

Yahweh was faithful to bring Israel into the land He had promised them and to come beside them and give them victory over their enemies. Israel faithfully obeyed Yahweh in all of His commands and joined Him in accomplishing His will on earth, thus receiving His blessings. The covenant faithfulness of Yahweh to give the Promised Land to the complaining and rebellious Israelites of Exodus and Numbers is the great message of the book of Joshua. And just as He was loyal to His covenant promises, He asked them to be loyal to their covenant promises to Him and each other as a unified nation.

More than any other book of the First Testament, the book of Joshua ends in a peaceful way, with Israel in the Promised Land and the Canaanites subdued. However, the negative note of Joshua's startling words in Josh. 24:19—that Israel would not always be faithful to Yahweh—shows that not all was well. Likewise, seeds of religious and political disunity and chaos had already been sown in the time of Joshua, first with the twelve tribes divided across the Jordan River Valley (Josh. 22) and second with the fact that the tribes had not driven out every Canaanite from His land (Josh. 13:2-6, 13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:11-12; 19:47)

Thus, the next generation of the twelve tribes of Israel were to finish the removal of the pagan influence and corruption in their own tribal allotments. The torch for obedience to Yahweh had been passed to the individual tribes and the next generation. The book of Judges will tell how they failed to continue the conquest and began to live among and act like the Canaanites who surrounded them, just as Moses and Joshua said they would (Deut. 31:24-30; 32; Josh. 24:19).

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